Establishing multidimensional credibility to overcome barriers to negotiated settlement

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Abstract

This thesis explores how the Cambodian state was able to establish multidimensional credibility, in the span of three years, vis-à-vis the Khmer Rouge in the Pailin region in order to catalyze defections by local power brokers, and ultimately bring a negotiated settlement to Khmer Rouge Insurgency. This process is reconstructed using local newspaper articles written at the time, as well NGO reports, analyzed through a synthesis of rational choice theory and structurationism. The Cambodian state overcame the barriers to negotiated settlement using a three-pronged approach to commitment issues: first, it addressed state weakness, mainly through military integration, to resolve the security dilemma faced by potential KR defectors; building on this foundation of security, the RG then moved to incentivize long-term adherence to the conditions of integration by offering KR power brokers a political-economic stake in Cambodia's post-conflict development; finally, discourse and the establishment of mutual understanding between former combatants contributed to the institutionalization of "national unity".

How was the Cambodian state able to overcome commitment problems in order to successfully catalyze defection by potential Khmer Rouge spoilers in Northwestern Cambodia between 1994 and 1998?

Abbreviations	Full name	Key actors	Active	Notes
CGDK	Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea	FUNCINPEC/KPNLF/KR	1982-1990	UN-recognized coalition government in-exile; dominated by KR
CPP	Cambodian People's Party	Hun Sen	1991- present	Formerly known as the KPRP; dominated by Hun Sen since 1985
DK	Democratic Kampuchea	KR	1975-1982	Formal name of KR regime while in power
DNUM	Democratic National Unity Movement	Ieng Sary/Ee Chhean/Sok Pheap	1996 - present	Split from KR leadership in 1996; led by Ieng Sary, but dominated by Chhean & Pheap
FUNCINPEC	Front Uni pour un Cambodge Indépendant, Neutre, Pacifique et Coopératif	Sihanouk/Ranariddh/Toan Chhay/Nhek Bun Chhay	1981- present	Royalist party, led by Sihanouk in the 1980s then by his son Prince Ranariddh
KPNLF	Khmer People's National Liberation Front	Son Sann	1979-1991	Non-communist rebel group active during the PRK-era; renamed to Buddhist Liberal Democratic Party (BLDP)
KR	Khmer Rouge	Pol Pot/Ta Mok/Son Sen/Nuon Chea/Ieng Sary	1970-1998	Eponymous name for DK/NADK throughout its existence; encompasses the group's military and political front
NADK	National Army of Democratic Kampuchea	Pol Pot/Ta Mok/Keo Pong/Ee Chhean/Sok Pheap	1979-1998	Formal name of the KR army throughout its insurgency; refers more specifically to the group's military structures/hierarchy
PRK	People's Republic of Kampuchea	Hun Sen/Heng Samrin/KPRP	1979-1989	Vietnam-backed government led by Heng Samrin, then Hun Sen after 1985; renamed "SOC" during the 1991 Paris agreements
RCAF	Royal Cambodian Armed Forces	Hun Sen/Toan Chhay/Nhek Bun Chhay*	1993*- present	National army formed during the UN mandate, composed of SOC, KPNL & FUNCINPEC forces
RG	Royal Government	Hun Sen/Ranariddh/	1993- present	Governing coalition between the CPP and FUNCINPEC, established by the UN-mandate; dominated by CPP
UNTAC	United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia	(Japan)	1991-1993	UN-led mandate tasked with disarmament and demobilization operations, as well as organizing unprecedented national elections
SOC	State of Cambodia	CPP	1990-1993	Formal name of former PRK, including armed forces during UNTAC
KPRP	Khmer People's Revolutionary Party	Heng Samrin/Hun Sen	1951-1991	Former name of CPP

Introduction

December 4th 2023 will mark one of the most significant milestones in Cambodia's history: on this date a quarter century ago, the final remnants of the Khmer Rouge (KR) reached a negotiated settlement with the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces (RCAF) after nearly 30 years of armed resistance. Even for historically-informed readers, it comes as a surprise to learn that the group – known for the unfathomable brutality of its rule between 1975 and 1979 – was technically active until 1998, with nearly 60,000 people living in KR-controlled areas around Anlong Veng (Thayer 1997). While this represented a major symbolic victory for the Royal Government (RG), close observers of Khmer Rouge insurgency would likely point to November 1996 as the most decisive month in the broader scheme of conflict termination between the Cambodian state and the rebel group. Indeed, the bulk of the Khmer Rouge's military wing, located around Pailin some 300 km SW from the Anlong Veng, had already split from Northern leadership and were integrating into the RCAF by the end of 1996.

At the time, however, foreign and domestic experts alike doubted the longevity of Cambodia's emergent peace. After all, the RG was rife with corruption and depended almost entirely on foreign aid, which only exacerbated abject poverty in the countryside. Hun Sen – KR propaganda's "arch-nemesis" – was still at the helm of the RG, and his Cambodian People's Party (CPP) continued to employ political violence as it moved towards totalitarian rule; finally, experts cautioned that the insurgent group had found itself on the brink of destruction in the past, only to reemerge in full force once the monsoon season set in. How, then, can we account for nearly 30 years without conflict recurrence in Cambodia's northwestern borderlands? What changed, and what stayed the same, between 1994 and 1997?

In this thesis, we will examine how the Cambodian state was able to establish multidimensional credibility vis-à-vis the Khmer Rouge in the Pailin region in order to catalyze defections by local power brokers. Credibility, simply put, can be defined as the belief that an entity is both willing *and* able to follow through with a given commitment. Within the context of intrastate conflict, it is a fundamentally multi-layered concept: material power, structural forces and individual agency each factor into the establishment of state credibility in rebel-dominated areas. The Cambodian state overcame the barriers to negotiated settlement using a three-pronged approach to commitment issues: first, it addressed state weakness, mainly through military integration, to resolve the security dilemma faced by potential KR defectors; building on this foundation of security, the RG then moved to incentivize long-term adherence to the conditions of integration by offering KR power brokers a political-economic stake in Cambodia's post-conflict development; finally, discourse and the establishment of mutual understanding between former combatants contributed to the institutionalization of "national unity".

Chapter outline

This paper is organized around the different facets of the aforementioned process, and each section proceeds from 1994 to 1997 chronologically, insofar as our theoretical framework permits[1]. To begin, we will survey theoretical literature relating to insurgency, negotiated settlements and peacebuilding. Most scholarly work on these topics highlights one of two overarching factors (a) material and observable (b) constructed and intersubjective. Thus, our theory-focused section will be divided based on these schools of thought, followed by key background on insurgency in Cambodia in order to build towards an inherently grounded, synthetic framework. This framework combines findings from quantitative viability models,

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[1] A chronological organization is most appropriate for the subject matter, as it allows us to conceptualize peacebuilding in Cambodia as a historical process unfolding over time and space.

political-economic theories of violence and structurationism, with the intention of avoiding an oversimplified conception of intrastate conflict.

Chapter 2 focuses on the ways through which the RCAF and RG established material credibility in rebel-dominated western districts from mid-1994 to early 1996, with the goal being to incentivize defection by KR power brokers in Pailin and those under their command. Here, rationalist viability models, emphasizing objective predictors of conflict outcomes, match best with developments on the ground *before* the KR faction in Pailin broke away from Pol Potists in Anlong Veng. This chapter is divided into two parts: the first lays out the RCAF's revised counterinsurgency strategy deployed following the army's failed 1994 offensives, which allowed it to establish credible security commitments for prospective defectors. By adopting a population-centric security strategy and relying on the integration of rebel power brokers into RCAF structures, the Cambodian state succeeded in bringing former KR territory, manpower, weapons and informant networks under state authority. The second part focuses on how the RG consolidated the growing material power asymmetry between its armed forces and the NADK by offering political-economic incentives – ex. salaries or positions within state structures – in exchange for defection. These commitments to reward defectors gained credibility as the RG formalized diplomatic and commercial ties to join the international economy, which not only made the "state fold" more profitable and secure, but also robbed the KR of its external support. At the end of the chapter, we summarize the objective bargaining position of both parties (RG and KR), as it was in the weeks leading up to the NADK's fragmentation in the months following the RCAF's 1996 offensive. Why was integrating into the RCAF a deliberate, rational choice for Pailin's power brokers, soldiers and civilians alike as of August 1996?

Without losing sight of these material realities, Chapter 3 shifts to the constructivist, discursive dimension of NW Cambodia's transition from insurgency to post-conflict reconstruction. Here, the subjective concepts of frame resonance, contestatory discourse and mutual understanding allow us to explain why the Pailin faction stayed true to its commitment to political neutrality, even after the breakdown of the RG's power-sharing agreement in July 1997. The first section of Chapter 3 follows the discursive challenges to KR doctrine that emerged from within the NADK's ranks between October 1994 and late 1996, in order to outline the most resonant justificatory narratives echoed by local defectors. Why was it at this point that the KR old-guard lost its ideological credibility to frames of national unity and reconciliation? The final section explores the interplay between observable reality, dominant interpretive frameworks and individual perceptions of reality, turning to the actual reasons given by KR defectors to justify their past and what drove them to embrace "national reconciliation".

Relevance

Academic significance

First and foremost, my thesis provides a systematic account of a key development in Cambodian history that academia has surprisingly ignored for the most part: the end of the Khmer Rouge Insurgency. Furthermore, the micro-level focus I adopt offers a bottom-up view of negotiated settlement, which contrasts with the macro-level perspective employed in other scholarly work on the subject (Doyle 2001; Peou 1998; Roberts 2002; Kiernan 2002).

The research completed for this thesis is also significant because it contributes a case-study to demonstrate the value of two dominant perspectives within Conflict Studies: constructivism and realism. More specifically, it pushes back against the tendency within academia to go "all-in" on a single set of ontological assumptions (i.e.

individualism/structuralism) and either rigid objectivism or superfluous subjectivism. In this sense, my research demonstrates that conflict settlement is too complex to be understood without both a synthetic theoretical framework and an interdisciplinary approach to social phenomena.

On a more concrete level, research into the negotiated settlement between Khmer Rouge insurgents and the Cambodian state is valuable because it helps ground highly abstract social theories (i.e structuration) in history and fact. If econometric rational choice theories dominate the policy world because they rely on "objective" proof, as Demmers (2017, 113) suggests, I believe that bringing verifiable, historical evidence *in addition to* discourse analysis can make it easier to understand and operationalize constructivist insights.

Societal significance

As Autesserre (2012) argues, reductionist interpretive frameworks have the potential to produce ineffective and even harmful solutions to humanitarian crises. In effect, the issues Cambodia faces today can only be remedied if we understand the legacy of this negotiated settlement in the country's northwestern provinces and its impact on local authority structures. At the very least, my research may help better understand and respond to the different "intractable" conflicts around the world.

Research design

My decision to use in-depth archival research was inspired by three works relating to the dynamics of insurgency: Stathis Kalyvas' "Promises and Pitfalls of an Emerging Research Program: the microdynamics of insurgency" (2008); Max Bergholtz' *Violence as a Generative Force: Identity, Nationalism and Memory in Balkan Community* (2016); and Boraden Nhem's *The Cambodian Civil War and the Vietnam War: A Tale of Two Revolutionary Wars* (2015). I found these highly detailed historical accounts extremely useful to illustrate metaphysical

concepts compared to quantitative research. More specifically, these works allowed me to operationalize or "bring to life" theories of violent conflict. As a result, I determined that the micro-level approach used in the aforementioned works was most effective and appropriate to reach a "thick description" of the final phase of KR insurgency (Mason 2008).

Data collection and analysis strategy

The philosophy underpinning my ontological and epistemological foundations is best described as a "humanist" approach to social research. For Plummer (2001,14. In Mason 2002, 56-7), this entails:

> showing how individuals respond to social constraints and actively assemble
>
> social worlds. It must deal with concrete human experiences – talk, feelings,
>
> actions – through their social and economic organization (and not just their inner,
>
> psychic or biological structuring). It must show a naturalistic 'intimate
>
> familiarity' with such experiences – abstractions untempered by close
>
> involvement are ruled out. . . And finally, in all of this it espouses an
>
> epistemology of radical, pragmatic empiricism which take seriously the idea that
>
> knowing – always limited and partial – should be grounded in experience.

Thus, the core of my research strategy was to amass as many reliable accounts of developments on the ground, and if possible, given by local eyewitnesses and longtime observers between 1994-1999. By doing so, I aimed to triangulate key events, rumors or popular sentiments, and government/rebel operations, in order to reconstruct this period of KR insurgency as it would have been experienced. My research began with keyword searches in the four accessible academic search engines at my disposal: Worldcat.org, JSTOR, the Georgetown University Library and the Bibliotheque nationale de France (bnf.fr). These sources provided a range of

literature on the dynamics of insurgency and negotiated settlement, as well as a baseline of Cambodia-specific research. However, after several weeks of searching, it became clear that scholarly sources were too macro-oriented, lacking detailed information about what the state *concretely* did to bring an end to 30 years of civil war, and how this was experienced by those implicated in KR insurgency. I then turned to annual reports from the International Committee of the Red Cross, Human Rights Watch and the UN to get an idea of the geographic and temporal distribution of (counter)insurgent violence, before determining that these were too brief and general to reach my thesis objectives. Nonetheless, these reports served as a starting point for a refined archival search in Cambodia's most reputed English-language newspaper: the Phnom Penh Post.

The Phnom Penh Post (PPP) digital archive is accessible using the website's search function, and contains all Post articles since its creation in 1992. The search punctuation searches through article titles and article content. Starting with a search for "Pailin" and "Anlong Veng", I looked to cast a wide net in order to get a general idea of the chronology of events leading up to the end of hostilities between the government and KR rebels. Based on this initial step of archival research, I wanted to find the war journalists who reported from the field, the key actors, key dates and the geography of the insurgency. From this data, I continued to refine my keyword searches, which facilitated the verification and precision of information.

Approach to data analysis

Although archival research is time-consuming, it allows us to get as close to the ground as possible without actually being present during the conflict. To sift through this mass of data, it benefited to have an understanding of the history of Khmer Rouge insurgency and contemporary politics. Building on my prior research on Cambodian civil wars, I needed to determine what was

factually true, what people believed was true at the time, and draw out the actor-groups involved in the conflict[2]. Thus, there was a constant back-and-forth between my findings, cross-national quantitative models of insurgency, and the pre-existing case literature.

In many ways, the PPP's conflict journalists do the heavy-lifting in terms of evaluating sources, triangulating developments and statistics, conducting interviews and contextualizing elite discourse/claims[3]. The only thing missing from these articles is a theory-based framework to interpret all this raw information and 30 years of retrospect to verify key information.

Challenges and limitations

As noted above, archival research is time-consuming and requires thorough organization to stay on top of references. However, a recurrent challenge throughout the process was to articulate my theoretical framework, which synthesizes ontologies and epistemologies that often present themselves as diametrically opposed[4]. It was equally challenging to organize and present my empirical findings in a comprehensible, intuitive manner while still referencing my overarching framework. Eventually, I had to accept that there would be tradeoffs between narrative fluidity and the inherently academic nature of this research project. Another persistent difficulty I faced stemmed from the inconsistencies between my personal ethics and the results of my analysis, which made me navigate between "objective" utilitarianism, moral relativism and a more absolutist humanism. Here too, I was aware that I would have to choose between giving a historical account of the establishment of credibility, and drawing normative conclusions about how to establish credibility from this historical account.

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[2] The three months I spent in the field in Siem Reap province in 2019 were also extremely beneficial, as I gained first-hand knowledge of local authority structures, down to the commune-level.
[3] A large portion of the news reports cited throughout this paper are written by pairs of journalists, usually one foreign journalist and one Cambodian journalist.
[4] See Collier 2000 and Jabri 1996 for examples of this.

Limitations

For the sake of feasibility and reliability, I had to restrict my archival research to the Phnom Penh Post. Although I was tempted to search through additional newspaper databases, I had to recognize that my research could not be exhaustive despite my desire to collect as many details as possible. Moreover, due to the fact that I do not speak Khmer, I was limited to English and French-language sources. This meant that I could not use one of the most extensive documentation centers dedicated to the KR, DC-Cam run by Youk Chhang. This would have contributed additional background information on KR political structures, but it should be noted that DC-Cam focuses on the Democratic Kampuchea period (1975-1979), not the insurgencies that followed the regime's eviction.

Subjectivity was inherent to the analytical process. Indeed, I ultimately had to determine what was true, what people *actually* believed, and so on. Further, I had to decide what mattered most in the broader context of conflict termination, which only exacerbated the moral dilemma mentioned previously. My previous knowledge on the subject was vital for evaluating and contextualizing information, but was also a potential source of bias. Initially, I found it difficult to take seriously any KR claims of representing the rural masses, and while I stayed far from buying into KR propaganda, I had to come to terms with the idea that some local populations voluntarily followed the group's senior leadership, or at least sympathized with the KR cause.

Overview of academic literature: The Gaps and Complications[5]

Conflict analysts seem to be far more interested in the failure of negotiated settlements to civil wars than they are in success stories. This selection bias is particularly strong in the context of negotiated settlement and military integration literature, which tends to highlight either individual determinants *or* structural determinants in order to explain the failure to terminate conflict. In effect, little attention is paid to successful negotiated settlements, particularly when there is little international involvement like in the case of Cambodia following international peacebuilding initiatives. The concept of credible security commitments can be found in virtually all rationalist bargaining theory, but how do they explain how these security commitments *become* credible? Quantitative work tends to brush over how credible security commitments are established between parties – if negotiated settlement succeeds, insurgent groups must have started to trust the state military, and vice versa. In other words, credibility is depicted as something that just appears at a certain point in a conflict, rather than as a socio-political process and construct. This is not to claim that sociological approaches have not been applied to the disarmament, demobilization and integration. Rather, the sociological studies relevant to post-conflict transitions reviewed here tend to rely on robust anecdotal evidence which is then generalized to groups of individuals more broadly. In other words, qualitative research on negotiated settlements also overlooks the processual aspect of credible security commitments, in which individuals, groups, social forces and material conditions influence each other.

The theoretical complication can be summarized as follows: in the context of insurgency, negotiated settlements to disarm, demobilize and reintegrate former rebel fighters and leadership

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[5] Initially, the focus of research was disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR), but it became clear that the developments in NW Cambodia were not examples of DDR, but political, economic military integration based on negotiated settlement – outside of aged and maimed guerilla, NADK defectors were not formally disarmed and demobilized, they were instead kept armed and active, assimilating into the RCAF hierarchy.

rarely result in durable conflict termination because belligerent parties cannot credibly commit to future guarantees of compliance. Yet, civil wars end, and former rebels are disarmed and demobilized, and reintegrate into post-war society – with or without international intervention. If the resolution of commitment problems is a precondition for negotiated settlement (Fearon 1995), and security guarantees only become credible when a third-party agrees to enforce these guarantees (Walter 1997), why did state-led negotiations in Cambodia succeed in dismantling insurgent groups and integrating former rebels?

Before highlighting the specific gaps or disagreements between each source, it is useful to point out where the literature agrees. Insurgencies are a distinct form of intrastate violence. The tactics, structures and objectives of insurgent groups make them particularly difficult to decisively disarm and demobilize, even if they participate in negotiated settlements. Getting rebel groups to the negotiating table is not necessarily the most challenging part of the negotiated settlement process – at times, insurgent groups may negotiate without the intention of following through (Hultquist 2013; Terry 2002). The classic "neorealist" paradigms in IR bargaining theory do not apply in the context of insurgencies (Fearon 1995; Walter 1997; Hultquist 2013; Bussmann 2019). Fearon (1995) calls for alternative "rationalist" explanations for violent conflict that emphasize the interactive role of "private information" and "commitment problems", concepts he refines in his work with Laitin (2003) in the context of negotiated settlement to civil war. Civil war is characterized by incomplete information between conflict parties, not only in terms of material capacity but also in terms of intention and resolve. Even if a rebel group's leaders may prefer a negotiated settlement, there is no guarantee that these leaders actually hold significant influence over insurgent fighters on the ground, due in part to the loose organizational structure of insurgent groups. Among those presented in Fearon's earlier work

(1995), Walter (1997) identifies *the* "critical barrier" to disarmament and demobilization in civil war: the credible commitment dilemma stemming from insecurity and fear within the broader security dilemma. Her logic is that the act of disarming and demobilizing puts rebel groups at risk of annihilation of the state if it decides to renege on self-arranged commitments. In her dataset, negotiated settlements "always succeeded" when an outside power promised to enforce compliance by all parties, leading her to conclude that state-led DDR arrangements are inherently not credible. However, negotiated settlement in post-1993 Cambodia was not guaranteed by an outside power; in fact, it was state-led (Bultmann 2018; Adams 2018). If Walter is correct that conflict termination is impossible without credible security guarantees specifically from a third-party, why were independent state-led disarmament and demobilization programs in Cambodia able to proceed, especially if the CPP reneged on power-sharing arrangements in 1997?

According to rationalist bargaining theory, instability within governmental power-sharing arrangements increases the likelihood of violent conflict because it reduces state capacity to respond to issues in peripheral regions, which improves the viability of insurgent activities that already tend to be concentrated in these regions. More specifically, shifts *towards* authoritarianism, in the form of coups for example, increase the probability that a particular state experiences conflict the year following the shift (Fearon & Laitin 2003, 85). If this is the case, why wasn't the Cambodian peace process severely disrupted when Hun Sen led a coup against his co-prime minister in 1997, creating "political instability at the center" and a move away from "democracy" (Adams, 2018; Fearon & Laitin 2003)?

More recent quantitative research builds on Walter and Fearon's logic relating to the critical barriers to negotiated settlement to civil wars. Hultquist (2013, 624) highlights that

different relative power levels affect the "tactical options" parties to insurgent wars possess, in a manner that is distinct from interstate conflict dynamics. Insurgent groups are designed to confront more powerful adversaries, employing "hit and run" tactics that allow them to avoid head to head confrontation with superior military forces. At the same time, the government has little incentive to negotiate with a group that does not pose a significant threat to the center because negotiation may backfire and legitimize rebel recruitment efforts. Thus, on top of the uncertainty and incomplete information characteristic of insurgencies (Fearon & Laitin 2003), power asymmetries between adversaries also prevent agreement on and implementation of negotiated settlements to disarm and demobilize. There are numerous problems when we apply Hultquist quantitative findings to Cambodian negotiated settlement. First and foremost, it is unlikely that the common Khmer Rouge or KNPLF insurgent had access to data that would allow them to determine their group's relative power on a macro-level. They were (probably) aware of specific local power distributions in their area of operation[6], but wider perceptions of the balance of power between rebels and the state is purely subjective, or speculative at the very least. Thus, the data used to draw a causal link between relative power and negotiated settlement is not the same as the information available to Cambodian rebel fighters when they were deciding whether or not to give up their weapons to the state. Margrit Bussman's (2019) quantitative study on military integration as a potential subcomponent of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration processes helps fill some of these gaps in conventional rational bargaining theory, particularly in relation to Walter's theoretical shortcomings. Without rejecting the premises that fear and insecurity hinder disarmament and demobilization, Bussman finds that the integration of former rebel combatants into the state military helps reduce these uncertainties. In the context of Cambodia, military integration (as opposed to social reintegration) was central

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[6] For tactical and operational planning

to the broader negotiated settlement process (Ferry 2014). This further complicates the role of relative power in setting the stage for durable conflict settlement, because integration of rebel soldiers into the state military decreases the relative power of rebel groups while increasing the relative power of the state. In other words, military integration widens power asymmetries, which Hultquist's study associates with conflict recurrence.

Stathis Kalyvas' competitive alliance theory in the "Ontology of Political Violence" (2003) helps account for the gap between the findings of macro-level studies and local dynamics of conflict termination. Large-N, cross-country macroanalysis tends to portray different actors at each level of conflict as "unitary" groups – civilians are the "masses", soldiers and leaders are "rebels", and government officials are "the state" – each with identical preferences, biases, experiences and motivations. The reality, however, is that the interaction between "political and private identities and actions" foster non-dichotomous, fluid and ambiguous motives for the decision to disarm and demobilize or to continue insurgent activities (Kalyvas 2003, 475). This conception of conflict as a dynamic, subjective interaction between individuals, groups and structures gets at the core of my research puzzle. Motives vary not only between individuals, but also in relation to perceptions of material reality and external conditions. Thus, the motives that drove former Cambodian insurgents to give up their arms and trust the state to protect them cannot be simply quantified and passed through a statistical modeling program. Rather, qualitative micro-level information must supplement them in order to understand negotiated settlement as an interactive social process that involves individual, group and structural determinants[7]. In order to overcome this theoretical shortcoming in rationalist bargaining approaches to disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, sociological approaches and frameworks must be brought in to complement them. These frameworks are especially useful for

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[7] This conceptualization integrates Vivienne Jabri's (1996) structurationist approach to conflict analysis

understanding the subprocess of social reintegration, a component of negotiated settlements that is overlooked by Walter, Fearon & Laitin and Hultquist[8].

The Khmer Rouge and other rebel groups in Cambodia in the 1980s and 1990s can be defined as insurgent groups based on their tactics, organizational structures and objectives. The use of extortion, human trafficking, kidnapping – not to mention other well-documented crimes against humanity committed over 30 years of conflict – qualify them as "abusive military factions" (Humphreys & Weinstein 2007). Thus, on top of the commitment problems inherent to insurgencies, material realities would suggest that state-led disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programs would not achieve durable conflict termination because every conflict party was "abusive". In other words, quantitative rationalist bargaining models would predict that former Cambodian rebels would be rejected from post-conflict socio-political structures in Cambodia.

From Daniel Bultmann's (2016; 2018) perspective, the sociological concept of habitus helps explain how individual rebel fighters were reintegrated into post-conflict society, as well as the way in which their respective habitus shaped their post-conflict status. The bourdieusian notion of habitus is defined as the set of resources – material and symbolic – at an individual's disposal and the nature of their vertical and horizontal social networks, as well as their personal predispositions (Bultmann 2018). In the context of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, one "military strongman's" habitus may facilitate attempts to transpose pre-settlement social status into sustainable political authority as society becomes less militarized. However, not all individuals who enjoy privileged statuses during hostilities are able to retain their authority, highlighting the variability of outcomes within DDR processes more

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[8] These studies – Walter and Fearon in particular – discuss barriers to disarmament and demobilization, but stop there - reintegration seems to be understood as a natural byproduct of credible commitments to disarm and demobilize. "Conflict termination" and "disarmament and demobilization"

broadly. In effect, some former "strongmen" were assimilated into Cambodia's post-conflict

political bureaucracy, while others ended up working as peasant farmers. Along with Shellman et

al. (2010) and Kalyvas (2003), Bultmann implies that country-level (or macro-level) statistical

analysis tends to aggregate too much information to truly break down ambiguous and dynamic

conflict processes like military integration. In other words, quantitative research into conflict

termination via negotiated settlements to disarm and demobilize often overlooks the local,

individual-level dynamics that allow negotiations to proceed successfully (Shellman et al. 2010,

83). At the same time though, more qualitative literature, like Bultmann's work on former

insurgent leaders, tends to be extremely individualist because of its reliance on interviews, which

are then used to draw out general principles applicable to insurgent movements more broadly. In

addition, only "strongmen" from two out of the four belligerent parties are included in

Bultmann's participant observation – former Khmer Rouge insurgents and government-affiliated

military officials, the main groups in conflict between 1992 and 2003, are excluded from the

study (Bultmann 2018, 25).

     In the study a Shellman et al. (2010, 85), "events data" – information in the open press

reporting on day-to-day happenings – replaces individual interviews in order to track the

patterns of insurgent-state discursive interactions in Cambodia between 1980-2004. In terms of

conclusions relevant to my research topic, the most valuable insight they suggest is that the

recurrence of civil war is determined by strategic decisions taken by individuals rather than

natural processes (Shellman et al. 2010, 84). While this research method provides important

group-level information missing from other sociological approaches, it still fails to account for

how credibility is established on the ground. In effect, Shellman overlooks the interactivity

between group-level discourse, individual decision-making and the more holistic process of

disarmament, demobilization and reintegration. Nonetheless, these limitations do not mean individual-level microanalysis should be dismissed. Quite the contrary – the tendency to brush over local dynamics is not just because there is a lack of raw data, as Shellman's dataset contains thousands of "events" information available in the Cambodian press. It seems that the gap stems from the difficulty of conducting participant observation research, particularly when disarmament and demobilization actually succeeds and former combatants have been reintegrated into civil society. If we recall the empirical finding from Humphreys & Weinstein (2007) that members of abusive military units have the most difficulty socially reintegrating, a couple of logical explanations can account for the limits of using interviews as a research method. First, former insurgents from the Khmer Rouge may be unwilling to reveal that they used to be part of the group that victimized every segment of Cambodian society over more than 30 years, because their peers might alienate or even try to punish them as a result. Second, there have been few systematic studies of Cambodian negotiated settlement specifically; studies on the transition away from open armed conflict in Cambodia focus on peacebuilding mechanisms (Ferry 2014) and the influence of international assistance on these processes (Bartu & Wilfork 2009; Adams 2018). Because they look to gather descriptive information rather than test a theoretical framework, these human rights approaches are useful to understand the conditions and policies associated with successful transitions from conflict to peace. Conflict termination is more accurately presented as a process rather than an event, but here again, specific attention to the individual-level and local dynamics that shape these complex processes, are neglected.

Generally speaking, the topic-related, qualitative literature focuses either on broad historical dynamics of civil war in Cambodia or the context surrounding the UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia and its eventual collapse in 1993. Fiona Terry (2002) provides the most

systematic, theoretically-informed accounts of Cambodian insurgency. She emphasizes how

insurgent rebel groups survived by exploiting refugees and humanitarian aid in Thai-Cambodian

border areas, which allowed them to continue their activities even as the state military

consolidated its territorial control in the 1980s and 1990s (Terry 2002; Kubota 2016; Adams

2018). These findings connect well to why rationalist bargaining theorists highlight the

conceptual distinction between insurgencies and conventional violent conflict, and by extension,

the "abnormal" conditions that favor successful negotiated settlement in the context of civil war.

In effect, Cambodian rebel groups often had little material or strategic interests to participate in

good faith negotiations, or alternatively, to participate in negotiations with no intention to follow

through. Thus, much of my topic-related literature helps account for the continuation of intrastate

violence in the 1980s and early 1990s, while also fitting broader theoretical frameworks of

negotiated settlement. The issue with my topic-related sources is not that they are unable to

identify broad patterns and local developments, but rather that there are few systematic historical

investigations of post-1993 DDR processes (Chandler 1999). Again, it is not for lack of raw data

(Shellman et al. 2010). It seems that interest in negotiated settlement initiatives in Cambodia

waned as the international community became less involved in peacebuilding processes[9]. Rather

than focus on these programs, academic debate seems to have shifted towards questions of

transitional justice and democratization, not conflict termination.

In essence, the gap in my theoretical and topic-related sources is an account of local

dynamics in the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process. There is agreement over

the difficulty of reaching negotiated settlement in the context of insurgent wars, but there is little

consensus over which determinants – material/physical, social/economic, individual/group,

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[9] It could also be a question of feasibility, but it should be noted that Cambodia still engaged with the international
community via the Khmer Rouge Tribunals (ECCC) even after UNTAC's mandate ended.

local/central – account best for the success of certain DDR initiatives. Put differently, there are many explanations for why DDR fails, but not for why it succeeds.

To be sure, rationalist bargaining theory is not invalidated by the success of independent negotiated settlement processes in some places. The datasets and coding choices used by large-N studies like Walter and Fearon & Laitin – whose data accounted for wars 1945-1990 and 1945-1999 respectively– do not include Cambodia's intermittent episodes of violence between 1994-1998, and there is little reference to this period as a case study. Moreover, the patterns of conflict onset and recurrence apply for the majority of Cambodia's conflict episodes. Positive, objectivist concepts like relative power and security guarantees are hence still necessary for a multi-causal explanation for successful negotiated settlements. However, these variables are only part of the larger puzzle that Cambodia presents us with. The analytical frame must also incorporate subjective, political approaches in order to understand the intangible aspects of credible security commitments, namely the establishment of credibility between belligerent parties. In other words, research into negotiated settlement in Cambodia must be approached by combining macro-level analysis, single-country data analysis with interviews and other forms of ethnographic data collection. By synthesizing these complementary frameworks, I should be able to gain insights into negotiated settlement as an interactive socio-political process while avoiding the tendency to overlook the ambiguity inherent to this process.

Part 1: Theory

Viability of insurgency

Fearon and Laitin (2003) define insurgency as a "military technology" that is able to harness "diverse political agendas, motivations and grievances", relying on guerilla tactics that prioritize mobility and local civilian collaboration over material superiority and territorial

domination (75). Given the right conditions, insurgencies can thrive on the basis of small numbers of rebels (ibid, 88; Boraden 2015, 57-58). Insurgents conduct these activities from rural strongholds, yet they are not "territorially bound" because of their mobility and the existence of porous borders where the neighboring country offers political sanctuaries (Hultquist 2013, 624). Guerilla warfare, as a military doctrine, is specifically formulated to challenge more powerful opponents by avoiding direct confrontation and extending conditions of insecurity (Boraden 2015; Record 2007, 8; Fearon & Laitin 2003, 79-80). Hit and run attacks on civilians and government infrastructure, the geographical dispersion of small units and a willingness to retreat are common guerilla tactics, which help rebel groups conserve manpower and supplies for more advantageous conditions. In effect, one of the central characteristics of insurgent groups is their "power to resist" state attempts to eradicate them (Hultquist 2013, 624; Cunningham, Gleditsch & Salehyan 2009, 574–575).

Irregular warfare is a structural context defined by the "fragmentation" and "segmentation" of sovereignty (Kalyvas 2006, 487; Kalyvas 2008, 405-406). Fragmentation refers to the existence of areas where state authority overlaps with rebel authority, while segmentation entails the division of territory into areas under the full control of different belligerents, complete with parallel governing structures (Kalyvas 2008, 405-406). Violence is less likely in segmented territories, called "Zones 1" and "Zones 5", where the state and rebel groups enjoy largely uncontested authority, respectively. Zone 1s tend to be populated political centers, like cities or large towns, while Zone 5s "tend to be in inaccessible rural areas" where the state's technological military superiority is neutralized due to non-existent or limited infrastructure and rough terrain – unpaved or undeveloped road systems, jungles and mountains, for example, hinder the movement of vehicles and troops (Kalyvas 2008, 406; Fearon & Laitin

2003, 79-81). Fragmented territories are referred to as "Zones 2" and "Zones 4", where the balance of power leans towards the state or rebel groups respectively. Generally speaking, state forces are likely to lack information about the allegiance of local populations in Zone 4s. Similarly, non-combatants living in Zone 2s are more likely to be targeted by insurgents by guilt of (non)association. Consequently, these areas tend to experience high levels of indiscriminate violence[10], and are often located in rough, hilly terrain (Kalyvas 2008, 417; Collier & Hoeffler 2004, 570). The majority of military operations, both state and rebel, play out in these zones, which makes it more likely for civilians to be caught in the crossfire; additionally, civilians may be victimized for suspected collaboration with the adversary (Fearon & Laitin 2003, 80). Combined with poor counterinsurgency strategies, as well as undisciplined and underpaid troops, state attempts to gain durable control often backfire and end up solidifying local collaboration with the rebels[11]. It is essential to note that these classifications often change over time: Zone 5s can rapidly become Zone 4s in the context of a government offensive, just as a military coup can turn Zone 1s into Zone 2s.

To better conceptualize the conditions favorable to insurgency, we can turn to viability models of civil war onset and persistence. These models, based on cross-country datasets and statistical analysis, look to offer objective, *ceteris paribus* explanations for the unique dynamics of irregular warfare. In the Fearon-Laitin (2003) model of insurgency, there are four overarching conditions that favor guerilla warfare: rough and hilly terrain, state weakness, foreign support for rebels, and an abundance of natural resources.

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[10] Violence is considered indiscriminate "when targeting is based on guilt by association or collective guilt", whereas "selective" violence rests on the determination of guilt or non-compliance (Kalyvas 2008, 405). Both are often instrumental. It should be noted that both types of political violence can take the form of mass killings and/or summary execution. For example, insurgents may exact selective violence on a village if collaborators accuse the villagers of hiding government soldiers – the accusation alone can serve as the determination of guilt.

[11] This ties back to the idea that it is perceived as safer to choose a side – generally the one that has previously dominated a given area (Kalyvas 2008, 412; Kubota 2016) – than it is to remain neutral in the context of civil war (Kalyvas & Kocher 2007, 182-183).

State weakness

State incapacity, proxied by GDP per capita, is one major condition that benefits rural

insurgency, making space for several other interrelated factors that help sustain "intractable"

conflicts:

> Insurgents are better able to survive and prosper if the government and military they
>
> oppose are relatively weak – badly financed, organizationally inept, corrupt, politically
>
> divided, and poorly informed about goings-on at the local level. Effective
>
> counterinsurgency requires government forces to distinguish active rebels from
>
> noncombatants without destroying the lives and living conditions of the latter (Fearon &
>
> Laitin 2003, 80).

As Record (2007) puts it, "distance dilutes direct combat power" in a number of ways, even for

the best-equipped armies. In the context of insurgency, collaboration is largely a function of

territorial domination because the group in control can "protect civilians who live on that

territory – both from their rivals and from themselves" (Kalyvas 2008, 406). Put differently,

access to the local knowledge necessary to end insurgency depends on the state's ability to

credibly commit to punish defection towards the enemy and reward collaboration with the state.

The physical disconnect between a weak state's power centers and its borderlands hints at a

broader "disjunction" between center and periphery in terms of goals, identities and authority

structures (Kalyvas 2003, 2006). As a result of these dynamics, the state is poorly positioned to

protect defectors living in Zone 4s from insurgent reprisals (i.e. selective violence). Corruption

and political division exacerbate the negative effects of financial weakness on military capacity

by reducing central military decision-makers' control over how operations unfold on the ground,

essentially making it impossible to translate their strategic priorities into coherent action in the

field. Corruption becomes particularly debilitating when it disrupts the delivery of supplies, equipment and food to the frontlines; similarly, political division can be equally debilitating when it undermines the military's unity of command (Howard 2019, 129).

Foreign support for rebels

No matter how motivated a group of revolutionaries may be, an insurgency cannot be sustained without food, guns, ammunition and physical safe haven. Corruption, political division and local support may provide a baseline of territorial control for insurgents, but if they seek to expand that control and recruit more fighters, they need more supplies than they can procure alone. Here, hostile foreign governments essentially subsidize rebels with financial support, direct military aid, and political sanctuary; financial support allows rebels to buy supplies from local populations and also contributes to weapons proliferation, direct military aid provides the equipment and hardware necessary to defend strongholds, and cross-border political sanctuary concretizes insurgents' lack of territorial boundaries. In addition, a hostile neighbor may deliberately make its side of the border porous to insurgents and contraband, while restricting access to counterinsurgents. This promotes the emergence of alternative economic structures dominated by insurgent powerbrokers.

Rough and hilly terrain

Taken alone, rough terrain does not *cause* insurgency, but it does lend itself well to rural guerilla warfare, acting as an equalizing factor between small, mobile bands and more mechanized state forces. Along with cross-border sanctuaries and center-periphery disconnects, rough terrain forms the geographical basis of an insurgent group's power to resist. Due to their mobility, guerilla units have an asymmetrical advantage over materially-superior conventional forces in these conditions, and once they retreat to elevated positions, the onus is on state forces to fight

uphill, in close-quarters combat, to eliminate insurgents. This is difficult enough for well-equipped counterinsurgents to do successfully, making it a "nearly insoluble" obstacle for poorly financed or nascent state armies (Fearon & Laitin 2003, 80).

Abundance of natural resources

Control over relatively small territories well-endowed in "high-value, low-weight goods such as coca, opium, diamonds, and other contraband" allows insurgents to enhance their operational self-sufficiency without necessarily controlling vast tracts of land (Collier & Hoeffler 2004; Fearon & Laitin 2003, 80; Boix 2008, 204). Profits can then be used to attract new insurgents/informants or disincentivize defection by valuable leaders; alternatively, profits can go into buying more supplies and expanding operations. Regardless, easily-exploitable resources (and willing customers) combined with state weakness helps enable the emergence of parallel authority structures in Zone 5s.

Frame resonance and the Structuration of "intractable" war

The sociological concepts of frame resonance and structuration are just as important as material viability in our understanding of cyclical violence, and by extension, the process of breaking so-called intractable conflicts. If the limitation of conventional rationalist explanations for successful negotiated settlements arises from its econometric approach, understanding intractable insurgency as a "social phenomenon" makes it possible to account for the unpredictable patterns of peacebuilding in NW Cambodia.

Discursive frames are defined as "schemata of interpretation" that allow us to "organize experience", process events and "simplify aspects" of the world at large (Benford & Snow 2000, 614; Goffman 1974, 21). Discourse encompasses communicated memories and written or spoken narratives, as well as "representations of how things *are* and *have been* (...) and how things *might*

or *could* or *should* be" (Demmers 2017, 140; Faircough 2003, 207). In order to challenge the incumbent status quo, prospective political leaders must diagnose, or articulate, problems with the current order, provide "prognoses", or solutions, to solve that problem, and give reasons why individuals should take action for/against that order (Benford & Snow 2000, 615). Benford & Snow (2000) note that "frames are developed and deployed to achieve a specific purpose" that aligns with the articulator's interests (624): in the context of civil war, narratives of "injustice" are often instrumentalized in order to motivate collective action, and serve to justify the inherently anti-social practices of belligerents (Schroder & Schmidt 2001, 10-11). These frames are characterized as "master cleavages" by Kalyvas (2006), or "grievances" by rational choice theorists (Collier & Hoeffler 2004; Fearon & Laitin 2003). The emphasis on the mobilizing power of discourse varies between schools of thought, but there seems to be agreement that "narratives do not cause action" alone, but they justify, legitimize and help reproduce patterns of behavior (Autesserre 2012, 207; Fearon & Laitin 2003, 88). In other words, frames shape the deliberative and reflective processes that happen before, during and after action is taken.

Two major discursive processes contribute to the development of collective action frames: frame articulation involves the "connection & alignment" of material realities to form a basis for the belief, while frame amplification refers to the way in which framers reinforce ideas by tying current events back to the articulated frames (Benford & Snow 2000, 623); these two processes must be done for all three framing tasks (i.e. diagnostic, prognostic and motivational). Frames do not materialize out of thin air, so to speak, and ideas about "how the world works" are not passively internalized by the "masses", nor are they unchanging over time (Kalyvas 2003, 475). According to framing theory, the mobilizing power of a revolutionary narrative is a function of its resonance with its target audience. The degree of frame resonance is determined

by another set of interactive variables: frame consistency, empirical credibility, credibility of the frame articulators or claimsmakers, experiential commensurability, narrative fidelity and centrality (Benford & Snow 2000, 619-622). It is here that observable or material *realities* ("how things are and have been") intersect with subjective, normative ideals ("how things should could or should be") to construct "reality" in which structures of domination are self-explanatory.

Empirical Credibility

Empirical credibility refers to the congruence between observable realities and a given diagnosis or prognosis. In other words, there must be real-world occurrences that framers can "point to" as evidence of their claim. However, this evidence does not necessarily have to be objectively valid: "the important point is not that the claimed connection has to be generally believable, but that it must be believable to some segment of prospective or actual adherents" (ibid, 620). Vivienne Jabri (1996) alludes to this variable, asserting that discourse must be validated "with reference to a shared external world" in order to affect patterns of behavior and the ideas that underpin them (164). In other words, "lived experience" cannot be ignored if we are to understand the persistence of violent conflict, and more importantly, the termination of civil war (167).

Articulator's Credibility

A prognostic frame is more likely to be accepted if the articulators are perceived as experts (Hass 1981, McGuire 1985 in Benford & Snow 2000). By pointing to past experience – embellished or not – a claimsmaker may be able to persuade potential and actual followers that they should defer to the authority of the claimsmaker. This reputation also serves to deflect discursive challenges to the claimsmaker's decision-making power, and to preserve this authority in the face of objective failures on the ground. This subjective component of credibility helps account for

"irrational" loyalty to a leader or doctrine, but it must be noted in the context of violent conflict that coercion is generally at the core of these beliefs.

Frame Consistency

The credibility of a given frame also varies according to the "congruence between a [social movement organization's] articulated beliefs, claims, and actions" (620). Hypothetically, greater consistency between values and lived experiences is associated with more resonant frames, assuming that hypocrisy provides a discursive opening for other SMOs to challenge a given narrative. Nonetheless, armed political groups throughout history have shared a clear incongruence between professed ideals and conduct on the ground (Collier 2000; Kalyvas 2003; Fearon & Laitin 2003; Collier & Hoeffler 2004; Brubaker & Laitin 1998).

Experiential Commensurability

The congruence between an articulated depiction of reality and the day-to-day experiences of the target audience is another major determinant of frame resonance. For example, calls to join a factory workers' movement are unlikely to work in a hypothetical country where 98% of the population lives in the countryside and works as farmers. However, if framers are able to discursively "bridge" the gap between peasant working conditions and those of factory workers by highlighting exploitative practices common to both industries, their SMO may gain even more traction. This caveat hints at a central characteristic of frames, which is their fluidity and malleability.

Narrative Fidelity

In this context, the term "narratives" can be used interchangeably with "myths". The salience of nationalist myths as *the* driving force between intergroup violence, for example, is dismissed by rationalist-leaning scholars like those cited in the previous section. Nonetheless, some studies,

like Tishkov's ([2016](#)) micro-level analysis of Kyrgyz-Uzbek ethnic violence in 1990, provide compelling evidence that constructed cultural narratives contribute to the use of violence in ethnically-framed conflicts.

Structuration

As purposive agents, individuals have the capacity to contest prevailing discourse if the opportunity presents itself (Jabri 1996,). Indeed, countless activists have expressed this agency throughout the world by challenging societal injustices. However, there is a reason such individuals go down in history as extraordinary people. Power plays a central role in the establishment of social structures and norms, and it is often, for better or worse, used to maintain that status quo insofar as it is beneficial to those in power (Jabri 1996,). Here, Lukes' (2005) three-dimensional model of power is useful to explain how power dynamics are upheld not by the first dimension of power alone (i.e. coercive, physical) but by the oft-overlooked "third dimension" of power (i.e. informational) as well. In this modality of power, powerbrokers use discourse to convince a group or society-at-large that a given status quo is in everyone's best interests, or at least better than potential alternatives (Manza 2018, 7.1.3). Through repetition in media and schooling for example, certain discursive frames become self-enforcing over time, and certain doctrines or institutions become increasingly hegemonic (Lukes 2005, 135; Autesserre 2012). In effect, with control over information and socialization (and violence), power holders are in a far better position to amplify or suppress a given frame than the average person[12]. This does not mean that only the powerful have agency and purpose, while the "masses" are passive rule-followers - in fact, central power brokers themselves are just as likely to be influenced by narratives and beliefs, not to mention at risk of manipulation by local actors

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[12] It should be noted that those in power are not necessarily nefarious actors within this theoretical framework. Indeed, "elite/mass" interests can be convergent and mutually beneficial.

(Kalyvas 2006; Autesserre 2012; Demmers 2017, 127). What this means is that anti-social patterns of behavior, like the use of violence to resolve conflict, become conditionally "acceptable" and even "necessary" if the frames used to justify violence resonate with the targeted group (Jabri 1996, 4; Demmers 2017, 131). Put differently, violent conflict is subject to the "institutionalization" of social roles, patterns of behaviors, and the power dynamics that underpin them (Demmers 2017, 124); there can be any number of "reasons" for (in)action in a civil war, but the common ground between critical and rationalist perspectives is that the onset of violent conflict crystalizes grievances and power structures. Over time and through historical processes (eg. insurgency, foreign occupation), the military structures become formal political institutions, military commanders become political leaders, and insurgents become soldiers.

## Building a critical realist framework for negotiated settlements

Kalyvas (2003) puts it best when he states that the "motives underlying action in civil war are inherently ambiguous and complex" (476). If conflict analysts predicted the outcome of a given insurgency based solely on the number of soldiers on each side and the number of guns per soldier, they would quickly be out of a job. It would be equally misleading to base explanations for collective action (like insurgency) purely on abstract discourse and intrinsic antagonism. Indeed, academia's tendency to dichotomize ontologies (greed/grievance; agency/structure) and methodologies (quantitative/qualitative; objective/subjective) only leads to rigid, deterministic conceptions of violent conflict (Demmers 2017, 124). Thus, our overarching framework must be versatile, synthesizing a range of ontological assumptions from the literature; it must also balance the fundamental multicausality of conflict dynamics with the constraints of academic writing.

This thesis adopts a critical realist understanding of patterns of intrastate conflict, using this perspective to account for the long-term success of the negotiated settlement between the Cambodian state and KR insurgents around Pailin. To echo Demmers (2017), violent conflict is best approached by "sitting on the fence", accepting that "objective" and "subjective" realities are not parallel, but ambiguously intertwined through discourse (145). On one hand there are objective, observable facts – the number of insurgents active in a location, access to military hardware, topography, seasonal patterns etc. – that cannot be overcome or neutralized simply by denying their existence. Yet, how people interpret and process these facts matters just as much in the context of credibility, as the *belief* that an entity *will* follow through with a commitment is as effective as the *knowledge* that an entity *can* follow through. As such, there is a basis to evaluate the reliability of different sources, the empirical validity of certain beliefs, and what information

to draw conclusions from. More simply, we do not have to choose between taking discourse at face-value and completely disregarding it, as long as patterns/narratives are contextualized with reference to historical legacies, power dynamics and objective conditions.

The following section serves to illustrate our theoretical framework using the RCAF's failed 1994 campaign, which targeted northwestern KR strongholds and marked the recurrence of localized, high-intensity insurgency. Although the offensives lasted only four months, the details "on the ground" exemplified why both rationalist and structurationist ontologies are appropriate and necessary to properly understand western Cambodia's emergence from intractable conflict.

1994 RCAF Offensive: January-April
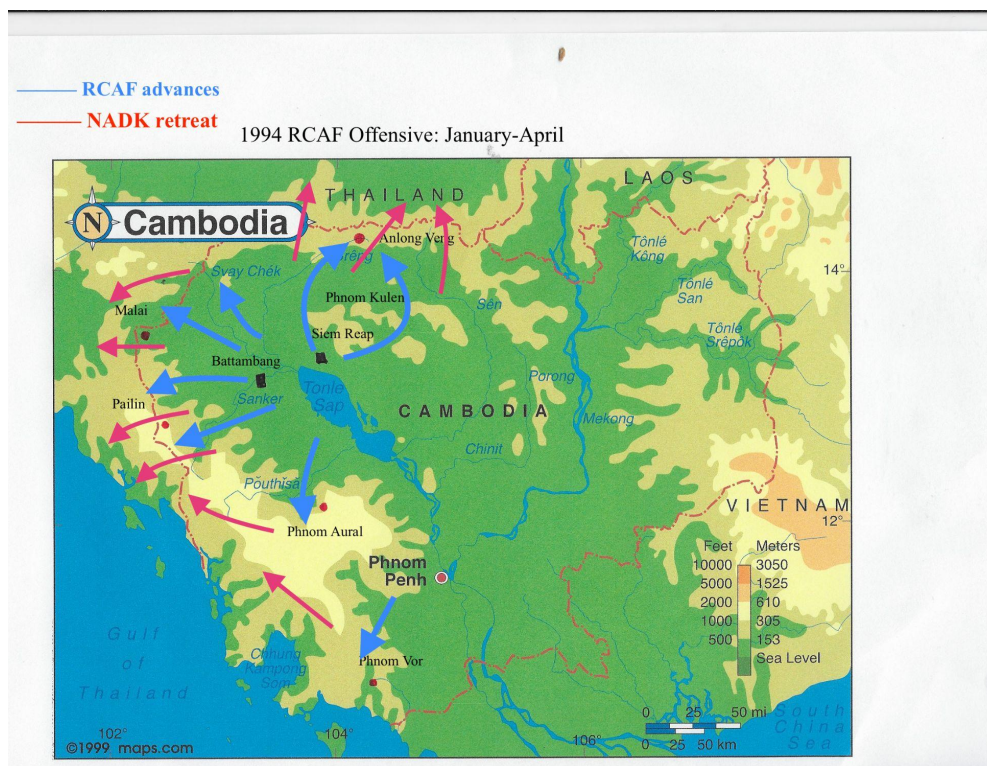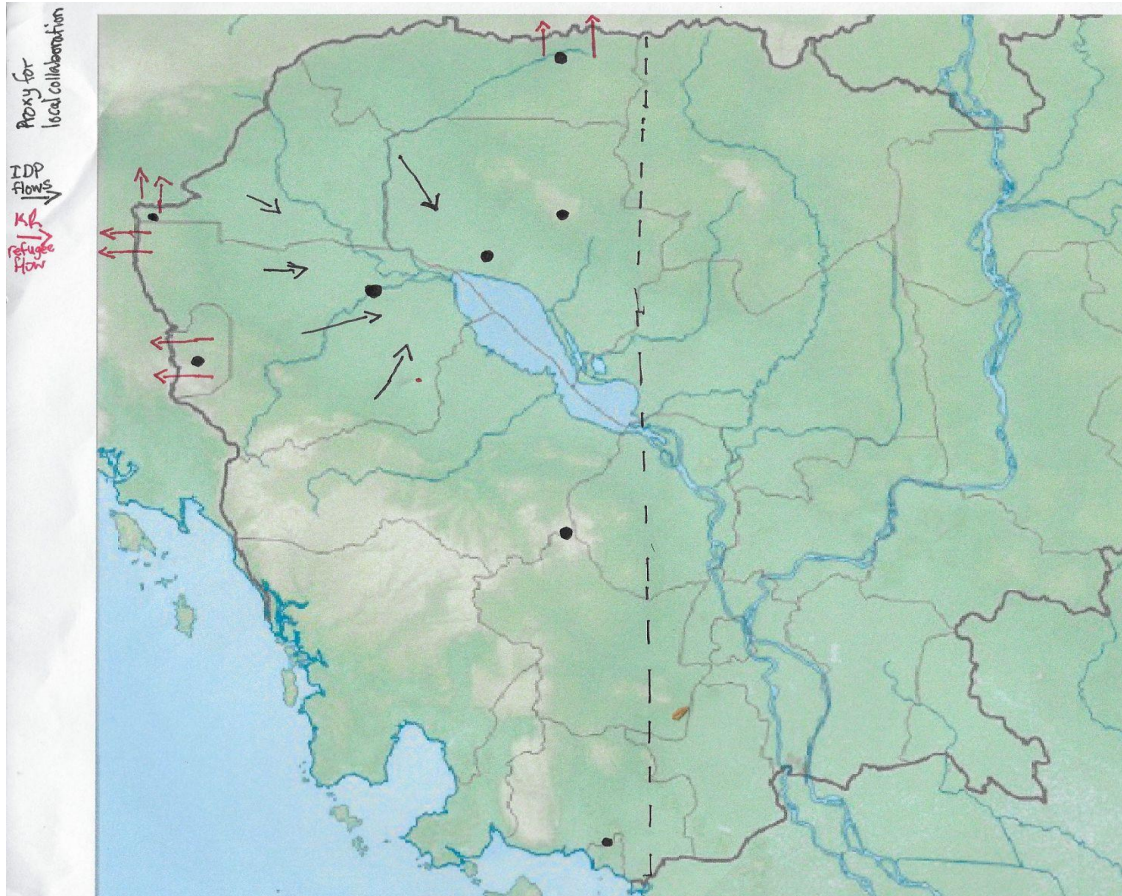
Grounding theory

The 1994 dry season RCAF offensives into Pailin and Anlong Veng backfired on all fronts, revealing the weakness of state security apparatuses, and legitimizing Khmer Rouge doctrine. From a theoretical perspective of viability, the nascent Royal Government failed to address most of the endogenous, "state-side" conditions that favored rural insurgency (Fearon & Laitin 2003, 80). Obviously, there was little it could do to change the mountainous landscapes and thick jungles that provided safe haven for Khmer Rouge guerillas. Moreover, Khmer Rouge military leadership had essentially perfected the art of guerilla warfare over two decades of insurgency, not to mention the group's disciplined and well-funded hierarchy of seasoned guerilla fighters.

Nonetheless, these government operations could serve as a handbook on what not to do if the goal is to dismantle a highly organized insurgent group.

The Royal Cambodian Armed Forces (RCAF) – a patchwork of the three non-Khmer Rouge armed factions integrated during UNTAC – were underprepared, ununified, and undisciplined. Each factional army was assigned one of the six Military Regions, and functioned independently (Brown 1994a); soldiers loyal to the CPP accused their former rivals of refusing to attack Khmer Rouge guerillas, while FUNCINPEC/KPNLAF troops complained about their CPP counterparts' inexperience in jungle combat (Thayer 1994). There were reports of mass desertions, as soldiers on the frontlines were left without food, water, or pay in the face of Khmer Rouge counterattacks (Thayer 1994a; Palan 1994). Rumors circulated about commanders executing soldiers who refused to fight in Anlong Veng, as well as the inverse situation, where soldiers would murder their "incompetent" commanding officers to avoid engaging rebels in the jungle (Thayer 1994b). One former soldier reported that he was forced to walk 25km back to Battambang *while injured* because high-ranking officers were using all their trucks to transport looted goods from Pailin back to Battambang (Thayer 1994b).

While military leaders in Phnom Penh were proclaiming decisive victories in both strongholds, sources on the ground were giving an entirely different description of the operation: "Nobody wants to fight, but we are soldiers so when our leaders order us, we do what we are told", said one division commander (Thayer 1994a); others reported that they were out of ammunition and medical supplies less than 45 days into the offensive (Thayer 1994c). This was not surprising given that the RCAF had opened up two battlefronts in rebel-dominated peripheries. Guerilla units had effectively cut off resupply routes as the RCAF overextended into the two strongholds, and were poised to retake the territory they had purposely withdrawn from

(Sokhet 1994; Post Staff 1994). Within one month of the highly publicized "Fall of Pailin" and assurances that
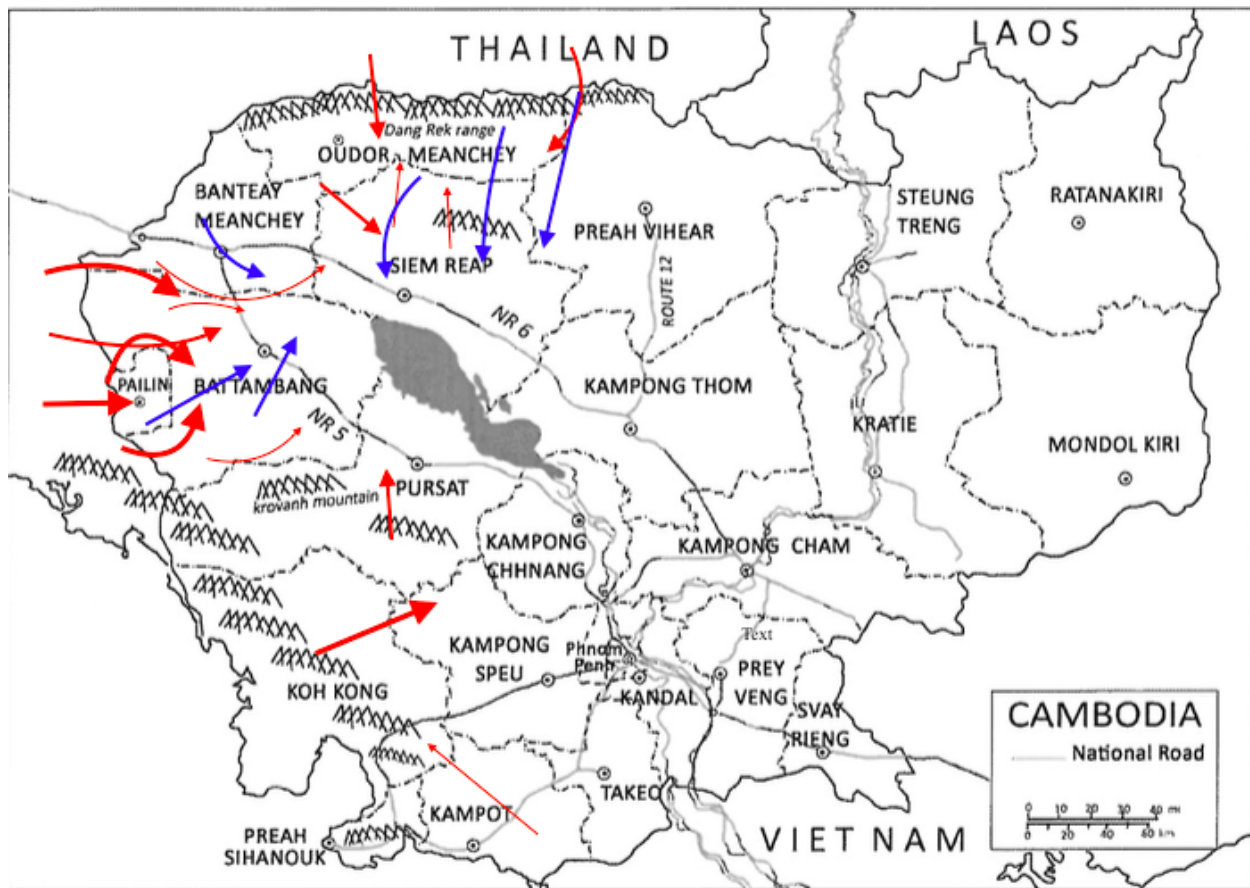
NADK Counter-attack: March - December 1994
Blank map from Boradem 2015, pp. 171; Edits in color were added

——— NADK advances
——— RCAF retreat

the RCAF controlled the "whole" Anlong Veng area, state forces were ejected from both towns and lost virtually all progress into rebel territory (Munthit 1994a; Thayer 1994; Brown & Munthit 1994). Reports that retreating RCAF units had left up to 80 injured soldiers in the Pailin hospital – all of whom were executed by guerillas – served as undeniable proof that despite its numerical and technological advantage, the state was in no position to defeat rebels on rebel turf (Human Rights Watch 1995, 2; ICRC 1994, 119).

Government forces were dislodged from the mountain stronghold of Preah Vihear, and
the Khmer Rouge began to ramp up attacks on local civilians, aid workers and defectors around
Siem Reap, Battambang and Kampot (Sokhet 1994; Sokhet 1994b Thayer 1994d; Post Staff
1995; Post Staff 1994). Both sides engaged in "scorched earth tactics", looting, sexual violence,
and extorsion, as well as forced conscription and summary executions, activities that spread "fear
and enmity" among local populations (Human Rights Watch 1995, 2; ICRC 1994, 119; Palan
1994; Thayer 1994a). For those civilians living in conflict zones, danger came from every
direction:

> On Route 5 near Sisophon, dejected villagers said they no longer knew where to
> turn for protection. They said that Sisophon to the north and Batambang to the
> south were both under threat and no longer a sanctuary to flee to. "We have
> nowhere to go to. We are scared of the Khmer Rouge. We are scared of the
> government soldiers", said one market vendor, her mouth pursed with anger and
> near tears. A detachment of government soldiers, ironically sent to provide
> security that morning, had looted her stall and robbed her. A blown up bridge a
> few meters away spoke of a recent Khmer Rouge attack. "They both [government
> and KR] hurt the people. Where can we go? Everybody steps on us." (Thayer
> 1994b)

Full-fledged insurgency had effectively engulfed the Western half of the country, and the
declaration of a KR breakaway state in July 1994 shattered whatever political and military
credibility the Cambodian state had following the 1993 elections and integration of SOC,
FUNCINPEC and KPNLF forces. After major donor countries halted military aid at the end of

1994[13], Cambodia found itself isolated from the international community as it had been in the

1980s, facing a seemingly reinvigorated rebel movement.

Cambodia Repatriation: final destination of returnees by province

More than half of the 362,209 Cambodian returnees from Thailand chose to settle in north-western Cambodia despite the presence of land mines and a shortage of arable land, owing in part to lingering concerns about the durability of the peace process.

[14]In retrospect, the RCAF's "aggression" revived the narrative of a People's War, triggering memories of KPRA counterinsurgency operations in the 1980s[15]. Indeed, the state continued to play its role as the "aggressor enemy", while the rebels "protected" their people by evacuating the populations of Pailin and Anlong Veng as government forces advanced[16]. Outside of the two years of UNTAC mandate (1991-3), this narrative was far from "imaginary" for those living in Cambodia's NW borderlands. The refugees who fled the Vietnamese invasion in 1979

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[14] Extract from *The United Nations and Cambodia 1991-1995* (1995), pp. 40. The areas shaded in black represent the highest concentration of returnees, many of whom resettled in KR-dominated or contested regions
[15] Acronym for Kampuchean People's Revolutionary Army, which was renamed State of Cambodia (SOC) army in 1989. See Boraden (2015) for details on KPRA organization and strategy.
[16] Boraden (2015) notes that NADK guerillas were known to consistently retrieve the dead bodies of their comrades, illustrating how personal bonds and social expectations can cause people to deviate from objectively rational behavior.

did not end up in KR-controlled camps by choice, nor did they stay in those camps over a decade out of love for Pol Potism[17]:

> We could only escape and run by ourselves… no one [could] be turned to for help
>
> as they [were] also running. We just run following orders.
>
> I was always on the run during fighting… I [didn't] know which side is good and
>
> which one is bad. I just kept running. (ICRC 1999, 6)

The core of the KR "People's War" doctrine was to blur the line between victims/perpetrators and insurgent/civilian, by involving the entire population in insurgency as "soldiers, policemen, propagandists, producers and intelligence officers" (Boraden 2015, 206; Grainger, Sarouen & Sinith 1998). By doing so, each segment of society effectively had a stake in the civil war, existing simultaneously as victims *and* perpetrators.

Yet, these structures were not just material: it was inevitable that social and familial relationships would emerge over years of interaction, forced or not[18]; plus, NADK commanders did not have to win the hearts of those living in their camps because humanitarian aid passed through the Thai military, then through the NADK command (Terry 2002). Once Vietnamese troops withdrew in 1989, the KR retook nearly the entire western borderlands and established an autonomous parallel state, populated by refugee returnees, ruling out of Pailin. Thus, little changed for the average person over the next five years, even as their leaders entertained and boycotted UN-supervised elections in 1993. These KR "citizens", as they were referred to, were issued an "official" passport, but remained in "paranoid isolation" from government-controlled

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[17] See Terry (2002), Robinson (2000), Slocomb (2001) for notable work on refugee camps along the Thai-Cambodian border between 1979-89.

[18] The DK (KR) regime had a policy of forced marriages between women and NADK soldiers, with the goal of artificially creating relationships/families after eradicating much of the adult population (Meta & Nachemson 2016; Cuddy & Channyda 2014).

areas (Ashley 1998). In other words, KR doctrine still structured every-day life for hundreds of thousands of Cambodians to the west of Phnom Penh.

When those who had fled the RCAF offensive in 1994 returned to Pailin, finding all of their possessions missing and homes burnt down, KR leaders had empirical credibility to reinforce portrayals of the state as the enemy-other. To quote the KR spokesman Mak Ben at the time, resistance was thus "a question of life and death" that implicated all members of insurgent society in rebel-controlled areas (Thayer 1994a). Under these conditions, no-holds-barred warfare, referred to as the "law of the jungle" by former combatants, could again be justified (ICRC 1999, 8, 22). To echo Vivienne Jabri's *Discourses on Violence* (1996), attacking and depriving civilians of food, for example, was again seen as necessary and acceptable in times of war:

> It [attacks on civilians] is right, because the people provided food
>
> to the enemy.
>
> It is right, because we have to destroy their economy…
>
> It is wrong, but we had to attack them in order to protect ourselves.
>
> It is right: attack first and solve problems later.
>
> It is right, they [civilians] were gathered and mobilized as [enemy]
>
> spies.
>
> It is wrong according to my personal opinion, but it is right
>
> according to the order to attack civilians who are transporting food
>
> supply for the enemy.[19]

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[19] Focus group with former Khmer Rouge fighters in Malai conducted by the ICRC (1999, 13)

Intellectual puzzle

Given these material and ideological continuities, it becomes even more puzzling to understand how Cambodia emerged from cyclical insurgency at all, let alone over the span of four years. So what exactly changed, and what remained the same between 1994 and 1997?

Part 2: Minimizing Viability and Incentivizing Defection
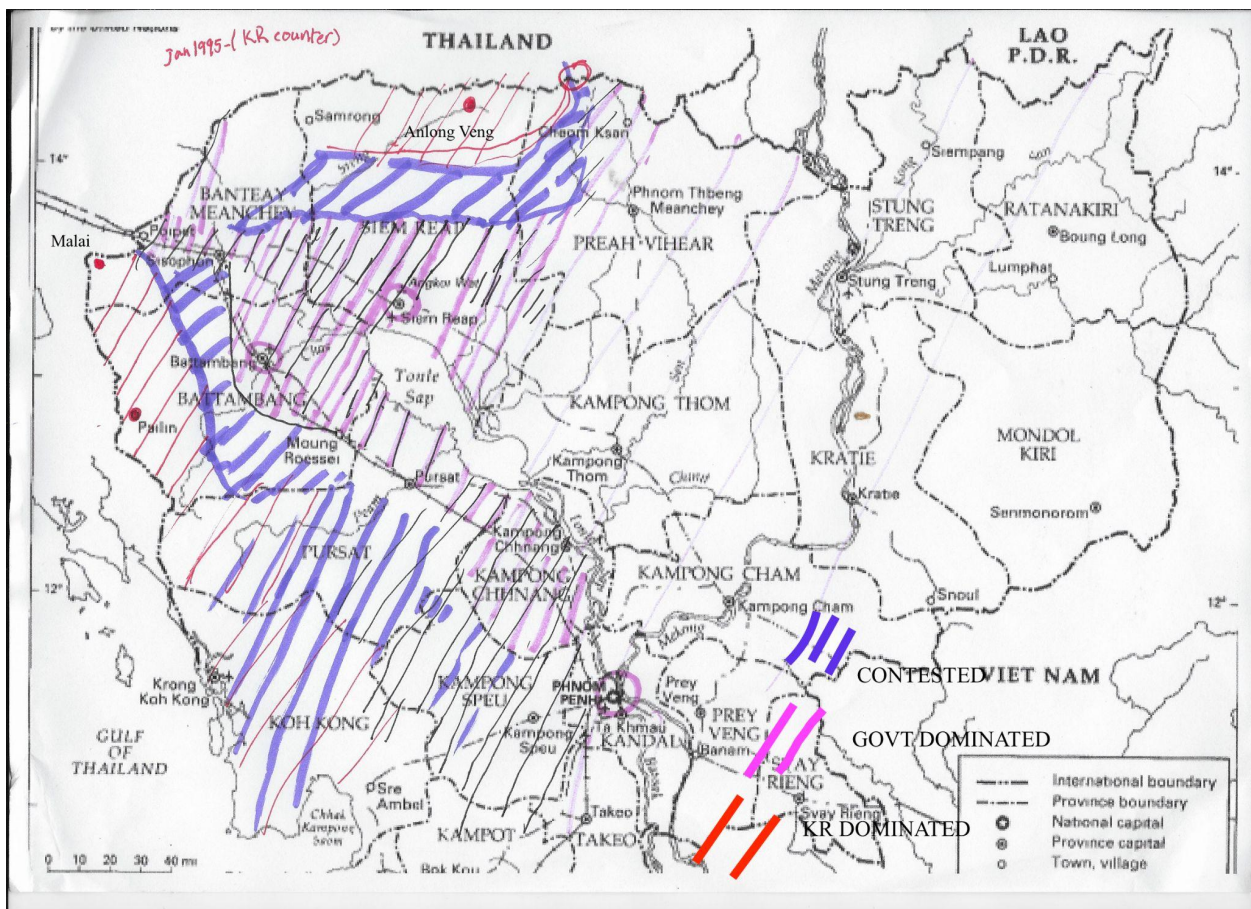
The months that followed the true "Fall of Pailin" to Khmer Rouge forces in April 1994 were defined by a reassessment of the state's grand strategy to durably terminate insurgency in Cambodia's Northwestern borderlands. During this time, until mid-1995, RCAF forces remained on the defensive in the face of escalating insurgent activity, while political and military leaders

implemented a "new strategy" that would address the conditions that favored armed resistance –

state weakness, rough terrain, exploitable natural resources, abusive forces (Fearon & Laitin

2003; Kalyvas 2008; Collier Hoeffler 2004; Boraden 2015). It should be noted that the success of

this strategy is evaluated relative to previous counterinsurgency efforts in Cambodia's history;

focusing on the improvements to RCAF grand strategy is not meant to overshadow the

continuities in its conduct towards enemy combatants and suspected civilian collaborators.

Nonetheless, both journalistic and historical accounts of the new strategy tend to dismiss these

improvements, and border on condescension when discussing the RCAF's capacity to implement

it[20].

This section will first explore the aspects of military reform – reigning in corruption,

streamlining the RCAF's hierarchy – and strategic recalculation – securing

government-dominated territory and forward positions, consolidating supply routes – that

allowed it to sidestep the security dilemma faced by potential defectors. I argue that the RCAF's

emphasis on the military integration of NADK power brokers made it possible for the

Cambodian state to expand its authority by assimilating local power structures, despite losing

foreign lethal aid. Consequently, the state not only gained access to local information, networks

and experienced jungle fighters, it also had the opportunity to concretely show prospective

defectors that the RCAF could credibly commit to respecting the conditions of negotiated

settlements.

We will then explore how the RG further incentivized high-level defections through

political-economic deals for peace, in many ways "buying" long-term loyalty from local KR

power brokers. Here, I argue that the RG's integration into the international community made the

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[20] One headline in May 1996 read: "Experts Doubt RCAF's Ability", citing military observers saying that government forces "tried really hard this year but they just didn't have the military wherewithal to do the job".

"state fold" more profitable and secure in the long-run compared to the KR's parallel economy in the Thai-Cambodian borderlands. In the broader scheme of conflict termination, it is essential to note that these deals, although based on systemic corruption, were contingent on peace: soldiers, commanders and civilians all had a stake in post-conflict stability, and thus had logical reasons to break the cycle of insurgency, beyond physical consideration. When understood as a gradual, multifaceted process, the establishment of multidimensional credibility is inextricably linked to levels of security in the targeted area and assimilation of local opportunity structures into the state fold.

Minimizing viability: The "New Strategy"

Table 1: Armed Forces of Four Factions

	Armed forces	Militia	Weapons	Heavy weapons[*]	Ammunition
CPAF	131,000	220,290	273,343	877	79,205,175
NADK	27,000		20,000	176	516,000
ANKI	17,500		13,500		742,000
KPNLAF	27,800		13,600		266,000
Total	203,300	220,290	320,443	1,053	80,729,175

[*] Including tanks, armoured personnel carriers, artillery.
Source: UN military survey mission report, December 1991.   Wang, J et al., 1996, 35)   **21**

Most realist approaches to counterinsurgency point to either the perceived cost of defection or benefits of not defecting. Once rebels put down their arms, danger comes from all sides (Fearon 1995; Walters 1997; Kalyvas 2003, 2006, 2008; Howard 2019). For example, the state can renege on its promise to protect former rebel leaders and punish them in order to score

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[21] CPAF - Cambodian People's Armed Forces, CPP-aligned forces; successor of KPRA, predecessor of SOC; ANKI: FUNCINPEC's armed wing. ANKI, KPNLAF and CPAF forces combined to make the RCAF.

political points with the international community. Alternatively, government leaders may see reintegrated rebel power brokers as a threat to their power, putting defectors at risk of political assassination. In the context of a chronically unstable political establishment, state negotiators may be unable to credibly project their authority into the future. Defectors are also prime targets for brutal deaths at the hands of rebels bent on making an example out of them, to dissuade future defections.

Military reform and strategic recalibration

Over the summer of 1994, the RCAF's General Staff drafted a reform plan that reflected the military establishment's long-term vision of peacebuilding operations, as well as an acknowledgment of the KR's power to resist against a divided, corrupt army. Leaning on "psychological tactics", the RG looked to "[foster] national development by ensuring national security and social order" (Brown 1994); the plan also highlighted the need to "solve the problems of the living conditions of the front-line soldiers", which led them to commit "illegal activities on the locals". In order to avoid overextending limited resources, the military integration of Khmer Rouge defectors and the consolidation, rather than the maximization, of territorial gains became the pillars of the RCAF's strategy (Vireak 1994; Munthit 1994b; Munthit & Hayes 1996). In other words, the military focused on improving the security situation in key Zone 2s (i.e. Battambang, Siem Reap and Kampot provinces) before moving into rebel-dominated territory (Sokhet & Sokhet & Reuters 1995). This would be the first step towards becoming a credible security guarantor capable of protecting Khmer Rouge defectors, foreign commercial interests and civilians. In line with this strategy, RCAF leadership held off from advancing into the stronghold in 1995, and it was not until December of that year that

RCAF forces began massing in Battambang, with 10,000 soldiers expected to take part in the major offensive.

Four weeks into the 1996 Pailin offensive, it became increasingly apparent that this move into KR-dominated areas benefited from better foresight and logistical planning than the previous. Indeed, there was more coordination between "top brass" and military commanders in the field: issues with food and salary distribution were ironed out more quickly, and observers noted a "significant tightening of military discipline among the officer corps" compared to 1994 (Munthit & Hayes 1996); in addition, there were visible improvements to the military's casualty evacuation and treatment operations (Watkins 1996; Grainger & Way 1996). Local observers noted that the RCAF was focused on "mopping up" captured territory by pushing out remaining pockets of resistance, isolating KR strongholds, and reinforcing resupply routes between Zone 1s like Battambang city, and Zone 2s, most notably Bavel and Treng (Sokhet 1995a; Sokhet 1995b, Grainger and Way 1996). Grainger and Way also highlighted that state forces were intent on rebuilding the "formerly impassible" Route 58, which would provide another entry point into the Pailin area from the north of the Khmer Rouge stronghold.

The improvement and expansion of the road system in NW Cambodia allowed the RCAF to make its numerical superiority more salient. Troops could move more easily, which allowed greater responsiveness to rebel activity. The establishment of a greater presence to the north of Pailin also helped minimize the viability of a full-scale retreat by guerillas in the face of a westwards push: tactical retreat would be more difficult and costly than it had been previously. Not only was its presence more visible in the western borderlands, it also made it possible to sustain pressure on the stronghold without leaving soldiers and equipment stuck on the frontlines. Furthermore, this renewed attention on transport infrastructure made it possible for

mobile medical teams to circulate between the frontlines and government hospitals, helping account for the improvement in casualty evacuation mentioned by Munthit & Hayes (1996). By May 1996, RCAF forces outside of Pailin were pulling back to Treng. Yet this retreat, unlike in 1994, was deliberate, preemptive and sustainable:

> An RCAF officer interviewed in Treng on April 26 said the army was doing just that [consolidating Treng]. His unit of 700 marines from the Ream naval base had been pulled back from the front lines and, along with three T-54 tanks, a 130 mm artillery piece and assorted other heavy weapons, were digging in for the rainy season. Crates of tank and artillery shells could be seen everywhere, backing up what sources say is an RCAF operation with "tremendous stockpiles" of ammunition (...) Combat pay of 2,000 riels per day were being added to regular daily salaries of 800 riels. Military rice supplies were ample, although troops had to buy their own clean water which was being trucked in from Battambang.
>
> (Munthit & Hayes 1996)

These maneuvers suggested that the capture of Pailin was not the end goal of RCAF operations as it had been in 1994; instead, the 1996 offensive served to apply military pressure in order to compel Pailin leadership into political negotiations. With these improvements to RCAF strategy and execution, the state bolstered its position at the bargaining table while simultaneously enhancing its image as a flawed, yet promising military force.

Military integration/Competitive alliance

In the context of military incapacity, financial weakness and political fractures, the Royal Government moved to establish competitive alliances with local Khmer Rouge military commanders and integrate the defectors into the RCAF. The integration of Khmer Rouge

divisions from Kampot and Siem Reap into RCAF forces between mid-1994 and late-1995 had a tangible effect on our dynamic viability equation. It not only provided safeguards for members of the first wave of defection, it also enhanced the RCAF's counterinsurgency capacities to the detriment of the Khmer Rouge's geographical reach.[22]

Given that years of insurgency and counterinsurgency had provided credibility to "paranoid" conceptions of the state, some defectors initially held back from surrendering out of fear that the government would execute them upon disarming (Sophonnara 1994). This was the case for Huort Him, 22 year veteran and commander of NADK Division 980 in Phnom Kulen, Siem Reap province. "My boss told me the government would not let me live if I gave myself to them", he said to Sophonnara. During the failed 1994 offensive, his commander may have been

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[22] Extract from Boraden 2015, pp. 171

correct; but after the implementation of blanket amnesty in July 1994, observers were "impressed" by how freely the RCAF was treating those who surrendered their weapons during the first wave of defections between August 1994 and July 1995 (Hayes 1995).

 In fact, even the more cynical observers cited in this paper admitted that local RCAF leaders seemed genuinely committed to national reconciliation. According to one former KR commune chief in western Batttambang, the RCAF "didn't confiscate anything. They let our people stay where they were, and whoever was in charge to remain so" (Sinith, Sarouen & Grainger 1998)[23]. If the Royal Government did hypothetically renege on its promises, the fact that most able-bodied KR defectors were rearmed and remobilized provided a safeguard that could function with a bare minimum of trust between parties, leaving space for "self-help".

> Looking bedraggled, hungry and scared, most defectors said they wanted to join
> the RCAF and go back to their villages. While they said they were tired of
> fighting, having a gun in their hands was the best way to protect themselves and
> family members from KR retribution. (Hayes 1995)

This also meant that defectors had skin in the game, essentially operating as territorial forces defending their hometowns and preventing rebels from operating freely in contested territory[24]. Consequently, integrated KR defectors helped state forces deal with strategically-dispersed insurgent units without having to stretch its improved, albeit limited military resources/capacity.

 Military integration also allowed RCAF to gain crucial "local knowledge" from well-informed local actors. In line with prevailing understandings of insurgency, the asymmetry in local knowledge – for example, who is collaborating with who, or which paths are free of

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[23] Based on Boraden 's description of how the KPRA successfully assimilated local defense forces, accepting/supporting local authority structures – as the RCAF did in the "new" strategy – was a core strategy for CPP-aligned forces throughout its history (2015, 211).

[24] One of Boraden 's (2015) main findings in his analysis of Khmer Insurgency (1979-1989) was that territorial (i.e. local) forces were widely accepted as more effective counterinsurgents than conventional units, in large part because territorial forces were tasked with defending their home villages from insurgent attacks (336).

mines etc. – was a key source of the KR's power to resist and destabilize the state throughout its existence. By absorbing local Khmer Rouge divisions instead of immediately demobilizing and/or interning them, the RCAF no longer had to coerce local populations into denouncing active supporters. Indeed, RCAF leaders could collect this information from defectors with intimate knowledge of local terrain and networks. In one instance in early 1995, defectors from Anlong Veng helped government troops track and demine the "millions" of mines in the surrounding area, "paving the way" for RCAF forces to capture the town (Sokhet 1995). State strategists were also able to obtain more accurate, updated estimates of rebel strength, strategy and internal faultlines, information that belligerents tend to misrepresent during negotiations (Fearon 1995; Munthit 1996).

The defection of Colonel Chhouk Rin, former commander of the KR regiment in Phnom Vor, Kampot, perhaps best illustrates the importance of military integration within the wider process of peacebuilding in Cambodia. The rebel strongman joined the KR at the age of 16, apparently inspired by King Sihanouk's endorsement of Pol Pot's "People's War" in 1970. Rin was one of the few guerillas "of his generation" that had survived American carpet bombs, the implosion of the DK regime, Vietnamese invasion and SOC-UNTAC counterinsurgency. Nevertheless, in October 1994, after 24 years serving in the NADK, Colonel Rin turned himself in to state authorities with the 100-odd soldiers under his command and their family members, after hearing about the Royal Government's amnesty program[25]. Upon defecting, Rin committed to "serving the nation" and to help "solve problems" for the RCAF; he immediately played a role in clearing vital KR strongholds in Kampot province, including Phnom Vor and Koh Sla (Sokhet 1994; Sokhet & Munthit 1994; Barber, Sokhet & Grainger 1995). State forces gained a unit of

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[25] He also cited a disagreement with his superior officer (Nuon Paet) over how to deal with the Kampot train hostages; Rin claimed he wanted to release the hostages for ransom, while Paet was adamant on killing them.

trained guerillas, and Rin denounced the civilian collaborators that used to resupply and update his 402 Regiment on government movement.

However, Colonel Rin's value to the state went beyond his efficacity on the battlefield: he was also credited with catalyzing the mass defection of hundreds of other rebels in the surrounding areas over the next year (ibid; Barber & Munthit 1996). In an interview with Ros Sokhet (1994), Rin claimed to have "never used arms' ' during the RCAF operations to capture the aforementioned strongholds[26]. Ironically, the man who lost count of how many people he had killed ended up being the key to avoiding more violent interactions between the state and local KR populations. This was possible because Rin's credibility could not be denied: he was the *de facto* political leader of Phnom Vor, interacting with the population and dispensing basic services for over 16 years (Barber, Sokhet & Grainger 1995). With local power-brokers like Colonel Rin on its side, the RCAF gained allies with legitimacy that had been structurated over years of Khmer Rouge domination and state counterinsurgency. These powerbrokers could then act as credible intermediaries between the government and other potential defectors, providing the opportunity for the state to build its own credibility as a security guarantor by following through with its promises. That is essentially what the state did throughout 1995: by November of that year, foreign officials acknowledged that the security situation in the center had been "stabilized" and that Cambodia was going in a "good direction" (Post Staff 1995; Grainger 1995).

Declining foreign support for rebels

As discussed in the previous chapter, geopolitical forces – Cold War realpolitik between Thailand, China, the United States and Vietnam[27] – played a pivotal role in exacerbating

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[26] Defectors also allowed the RCAF to capture Anlong Veng "with no fighting": the guerilas stationed to defend the stronghold were "allowed to live there" because they were "sincere, cooperative and friendly" (Sokhet 1995).

[27] Vietnam also played a major role in the influx of weapons into Cambodia, not to mention its unrestricted use of landmines in the country's northwestern provinces. See Slocomb's "The K5 gamble" (2001)

rebel-side conditions favorable to insurgency in Cambodia. Both large-n (Collier & Hoeffler 2004, 568; Fearon & Laitin 2003) and single-country case studies (Boraden 2015, 333; Terry 2002; Tully 2006) highlight that the existence of a hostile government that provides cross-border sanctuary and financial support for rebels is a major determinant of insurgent viability. Pol Pot himself had warned that the loss of foreign allies made it "possible for Democratic Kampuchea to be weakened", and that the NADK would be at a disadvantage if Thailand normalized its ties with the Royal Government (Fawthorp 1994; Thayer 1996). Again, the logic is straightforward: when a neighboring country offers sanctuary to insurgents, rebel groups are able to avoid annihilation by materially superior forces by crossing the border, unless the counterinsurgent is prepared to spark an international crisis (Hultquist 2013, 624). Similarly, foreign sponsors provide rebel groups with the material assistance – cash, hardware or both – they need in order to engage in guerilla warfare, without necessarily having complete control over resource-rich areas. By extension, the loss of foreign sponsors can be expected to negatively impact rebel viability, depending on the extent to which the group has become self-sufficient financially and organizationally (Boraden 2015, 333).

Collusion between the first three countries had effectively reinvigorated the Khmer Rouge in 1979[28], who were still reeling from Vietnam's invasion that year. In the context of the Sino-Vietnamese rivalry, China provided war matériel and funds directly to the Khmer Rouge, which generally passed through the Thai military (Abuza 1993, 1010; Tully 2006, 201); to counter the perceived threat of Vietnamese expansionism, Thailand provided physical safe haven for rebels throughout the 1980s (Terry 2002, 204; Tully 2006, 201), and was the Khmer Rouge's primary trading partner until 1995. As for the US, much of its material aid to the non-communist

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[28] Over the ten years of Vietnamese presence in Cambodia, China provided upwards of $80 million per year to Khmer Rouge leadership via banks in Thailand, and an additional 300-500 tonnes of military supplies per month (Abuza 1993, 1011; Terry 2002, 121)

factions eventually found its way onto the black market and into NADK weapon depots in Thailand (Terry 2002, 121). In addition, the H.W. Bush administration encouraged Thailand to step up its trade with KR authorities in Pailin, assuming that increased wealth in KR zones would liberalize the group (Grainger 1996). The long term impact of this position on the Khmer Rouge's ideological integrity can be debated, but in the short-term only served to solidify the group's self-sufficiency.

Following the UN mission to Cambodia, Thailand was the only state among those listed above that had not cut ties with the Khmer Rouge: as late as April 1994, the Thai military provided training, weapons and fuel to the NADK (Etcheson 1993; Fawthorp 1994). China had redirected its aid to Sihanouk's political party after Khmer Rouge leadership refused to comply with UN-sponsored DDR provisions (Abuza 1993, 1011; Etcheson 1993; Thayer 1995a; Boraden 2015, 311); additionally, the United States began to pressure Thailand's military authorities to rein in their direct support for Cambodian rebels, and to monitor the entry of armed guerillas into Thai territory; if military support continued, President Clinton would be legally obligated to suspend aid to Thailand, based on Senate bill passed in 1994 (Thayer 1995a; Grainger 1996). Nevertheless, the Khmer Rouge were still in complete control of the Pailin region in January 1995, able to offer lower prices and protection to Thai mining and timber companies, while the RCAF was in no position to follow through with security guarantees in Cambodia's borderlands[29] (Brown 1994). If direct military support did wane as a result of US warnings, as Fawthorp's article in late 1994 would suggest, the lucrative commercial ties between Thai companies and Khmer Rouge powerbrokers remained strong, generating an estimated $15 million per month. In a 1995 letter to Clinton, US Senator Craig Thomas[30] wrote that:

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[29] One RCAF veteran from the 1994 offensive claimed that the torture and execution of Thai nationals on Cambodian soil occurred regularly, and without reprimand (Thayer 1994b).

[30] Chairman of the Senate's subcommittee on East Asian and Pacific Affairs (1995)

> The Thais have consistently, albeit often disingenuously, denied any ties to the KR
>
> or to the timber trade (...) Each round of denials, however, is soon followed by
>
> press reports and concrete evidence to the contrary (...) [Global Witness reports in
>
> May 1995] fully confirm, in my opinion, that the trucks are still rolling across the
>
> Thai border. (Grainger 1995)

The aforementioned 1994 *US Foreign Operations Act* was consequently amended to cover

countries with business ties with Khmer Rouge separatists, meaning that Thailand was still at

risk of losing American aid unless it made concrete progress towards enforcing an international

ban on Cambodian timber (ibid). It was at this point, in late May 1995, that large-scale logging

operations came to a halt, with "only a fraction of what had gone before" (Grainger 1996;

Scroggins 1997). Moreover, as the RCAF underwent reform and began to consolidate control

over key Zone 2s[31] (Pursat, Kampot, Kampong Speu, Siem Reap), Thai companies became more

receptive to renegotiating land concession contracts with Cambodian state authorities. According

to Grainger (ibid):

> [Thai officials] recognized that as the Royal Government became stronger, there
>
> was less reason to deal with the KR, "especially when the same amount of money
>
> could [legitimately] be made with Phnom Penh," said one expert.

In effect, the salience of the government's material superiority increased as the Khmer Rouge's

ability to protract conflict decreased. Without crossborder sanctuaries in Thailand, the Khmer

Rouge lost one of their greatest advantages over state forces: the absence of territorial restrictions

on movement. Civilians and unarmed soldiers still had access to refugee camps across the

border, but guerilla units were now limited, for the most part, to the forest-covered mountains

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[31] Key trade routes from the Gulf of Thailand passed through the South/Southwestern provinces of Pursat, Kampot and Kampong Speu, and were thus of particular strategic value; Siem Reap was equally important, mainly for symbolic reasons but also because of its touristic value (Munthit 1994).

around their strongholds. Even if these natural refuges continued to shield rebels from outright defeat, 1996 marked the first time Khmer Rouge strategists could not count on the Thai government to provide the space to regroup and reassess their options as the government advanced. Moreover, as direct material assistance from Thailand declined, Khmer Rouge leadership found it increasingly difficult to procure supplies for their operations, with Ta Mok regularly complaining about the money he had to spend to access caches in Thailand (Fawthorp 1994). This undoubtedly had a psychological impact on perceptions of viability: several KR defectors interviewed by Fawthorp (1994) underlined that the material repercussions of this geopolitical turn made day-to-day operations more difficult than they had been in the past.

The final blow to hopes of renewed Thai-KR economic ties came in the wake of increasing international scrutiny over Thai-KR business ties. In January 1996, Thailand's deputy Prime Minister and Cambodia's Minister of Agriculture reportedly signed a deal that would provide 17 Thai firms access to over one million cubic meters of Cambodian timber (Post Staff 1996). Of the 17 companies involved in the so-called "million meter deal", 16 had pre-existing agreements with Khmer Rouge authorities to cut timber in rebel-controlled territory (Grainger 1996)[32]. However, the formalization of economic ties between Thailand and the Royal Government did not mean that those companies needed to scrap previous deals; instead, they had to "modify" their contracts to deal with the government and seek approval from Cambodia's Prime Ministers and Development Council (Grainger & Chaumeau 1996).

Regardless of whether it is driven by greed or grievance, an insurgent group's power depends in large part on its ability to procure funds for its activities; it follows logically that the

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[32] Much of this timber was already cut, but was left to "rot" in the Cambodian borderlands due to the international moratorium on Cambodian wood, not to mention the US Foreign Operations Act discussed in the previous section (Post Staff 1998). The "million meter deal" was a simple way to avoid losing U.S. aid (by dealing with the RG) while also appeasing Thai logging and mining companies involved in KR deals.

loss of revenue sources reduces the viability of continued resistance. For the Khmer Rouge, the loss of an estimated $35 million in logging revenue compounded the shifting military balance of power in Cambodia (Post Staff 1995a, Grainger 1995, Grainger 1996). Former NADK commanders "paint[ed] a picture of a demoralized KR leadership lacking cash, ammunition and help from the Thais" (Post Staff 1995a;); and in April 1996 Keo Pong, a KR general who had defected two months earlier, confirmed rumors of growing fractures between Pailin leadership and Pol Potists further North over the political and economic future of the movement[33] (Munthit 1996; Grainger 1996). Indeed, the material strains on the group were becoming increasingly visible, too concrete for Khmer Rouge leadership to deny or dismiss.

In contrast, the RCAF was in the process of enhancing its capacity to hold territory and counter guerilla tactics. This entailed: accepting technical support and training from the Australian military, in order to further professionalize the RCAF's 3,000-man Counterguerilla divisions (Hayes 1996); integrating civilians into reconstruction activities through "Food for Work" programs, which also incentivized local collaboration with state forces (Grainger & Way 1996); finally, integrating defectors as territorial units allowed the RCAF to focus on security in Zone 2.

In sum, the changes to RCAF counterinsurgency strategy set the groundwork to overcome one critical barrier to negotiated settlement in civil war: state incapacity and the resulting inability to provide credible security guarantees to potential defectors. During the 1994 offensive, corruption, incompetence and infighting disrupted sustainment operations, making it impossible for the RCAF to hold forward positions in Khmer Rouge strongholds. With a greater

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[33] Pailin headlined by Ieng Sary & Ee Chhean; Northern leadership, in and around Anlong Veng, loyal to Pol Pot & Ta Mok. Several reliable sources, including Thayer (1994, 1994, 1996), reported that the fissures between Sary and Pol Pot emerged as early as 1991, presumably in relation to the UN-led Paris Agreements; Keo Pong also told Munthit that Sary was definitively demoted as of early 1996.

focus on a more limited military objective – improving security conditions in government-dominated Zone 2s – the RCAF could concretely build its reputation as an effective military force; simultaneously, central leadership moved, albeit inconsistently, to improve discipline and build trust between the state and insurgent society. The Royal Government did benefit from geopolitical shifts in its favor, but this was contingent on its ability to make use of assistance and translate success on the battlefield into sustainable progress towards conflict termination. In other words, as Boraden (2015, 357) suggests, the attainment of durable peace was ultimately determined by the actions of the local government and its security apparatuses. Without a viable political strategy aimed at fragmenting the Khmer Rouge while the state had the upper hand, the RCAF risked getting washed out of their forward positions as the wet season set in.

Part 3: Political-economic incentivization

One of the core tenets of rationalist approaches to insurgency is that war is profitable for a myriad groups. Thus, Keen (2008, 15) posits that "wars very often are not about *winning*", but *extending* the conditions of war (Demmers 2017, 113) Local political elites, military strongmen and criminal organizations can accrue wealth by controlling territory and power through "ethnic entrepreneurship" (Smith 2006; Walter 2022); multinational corporations may find cheaper land concessions from rebels to extract primary resources (Collier & Hoeffler 1998); foreign governments can sell more weapons, finding willing customers in armed actors; finally – and most dubiously – combatants profit from war by looting (Collier & Hoeffler 2000; Fearon & Laitin 2003; Tarrow 2007; Dobbins et al., 2013). Obviously, violent conflict is far more ambiguous than early rational choice theory would suggest, but that does not negate the fact that civil wars are often "produced" by self-interested actors, most notably those in power (Keen

2008, 15; Demmers 2017, 113). In other words, violent conflict is not organic, with a natural life-cycle independent from those involved.

It follows, then, that economic interests would play a role in the termination of insurgency. If those in power could benefit as much, if not more, from the conditions of peace than war, then there would be one less factor to drive conflict. In Cambodia, the Royal Government's diplomatic maneuvering and willingness to bring rebel leaders into the "state fold" built on the RCAF's foundation of security guarantees in contested zones, which in turn provided an opening for foreign companies to invest in the country's future development. As it became clearer that peace would provide more economic opportunities – tourism and infrastructure – for KR power brokers, on top of land concessions, Pailin leaders grew increasingly willing to negotiate in good faith with the RG.

Concretely, the core of the Royal Government's new grand strategy consisted of transactional deals between CPP leadership and Khmer Rouge powerbrokers, first in Pailin , and later in Anlong Veng. Like its revised military strategy, the assimilation of rebel power structures – both political and economic – into state institutions would unfold in a "slow and steady" manner. In the context of an increasingly wide but not overwhelming power asymmetry between rebel and state in NW provinces, these deals aimed to affect both sides of the "rationalized" choice equation: (1) the state reduced the "cost" of defecting by extending legal amnesty and royal pardons to soldiers and leaders, regardless of their implication in crimes against humanity (2) to increase the "benefits" of defecting, the state provided material incentives to Pailin Khmer Rouge powerbrokers and soldiers in return for their neutrality. In other words, the Royal Government offered a place in Cambodia's future political-economic status quo to powerbrokers, integration into RCAF's ranks for former guerilas, and non-interference into the lives of Khmer

Rouge civilians. Whether these offers were acceptable was contingent on the credibility of the Royal Government and RCAF's commitment to protect, reward and integrate Khmer Rouge defectors, while the second objective depended on the Royal Government's stability and standing in the international community, as well as its ability to co-opt rebel political-economic structures.

Integration into international economy

Between 1995 and 1997, the Royal Government accelerated its integration into the international economic system with a series of diplomatic meetings with regional powers, the completion of a number of deals with foreign companies from Thailand, Malaysia, South Korea and Indonesia, and Cambodia's acceptance into the US's list of Most Favored Nations (MFN). By doing so, it could make the state fold more profitable while also making it more difficult to profit outside of government structures. Additionally, international recognition conferred *de facto* authority to the Cambodian state, something that regional and international powers had deliberately undermined for the entirety of the post-DK era. With a lucrative and secure state fold, the transactional deals proposed by government negotiators to potential defectors became increasingly difficult to reject, especially given the shifting balance of power in NW Cambodia. Put differently, the RG was doing more than just offering a lifeboat to KR power brokers in Pailin: it was offering them a yacht after piercing holes in the previous ship's hull. To complete the boat analogy, the new yacht was identical to the old one, except for the flag it flew – RCAF instead of KR. Indeed, little would actually change in terms of resource exploitation and local authority structures: thousands of hectares of forest could still be cut down, logs and gems would continue to funnel out of Cambodia's borders, and material power remained central to building economic power.

1995 was marked by several milestones towards Cambodia's integration into the international economy. Together, these developments increased the payout of reaching a negotiated settlement; at the same time, they collectively provided evidence that the Royal Government was there to stay, regardless of the fact that the RCAF remained on the defensive in the Northwest. In April 1995, the U.S. House of Representatives signed a bill granting Cambodia Most Favored Nation status (MFN) and entry into the Generalized System of Preference (GSP) (Post Staff 1995)[34]. Although the bill had to pass through the U.S. Senate and its Acting Trade Representative – a process that would take a year and a half – MFN and GSP status opened the country up to "billions of dollars" of American investment. Before these bilateral agreements, Cambodian exports to the U.S. were subject to significant tariffs of 50% or more, which effectively nullified whatever competitive advantage cheap labor offered to profit-hungry foreign companies (Chheng & Barber 1995). With GSP membership, the Royal Government would see these tariffs disappear on most of their exports, which was expected to attract over $3 billion in long-term investments from American and multinational corporations (ibid). Taking into account the strong business ties between Thailand and the U.S., in addition to the complicity of Thai and American companies in Cambodia's illegal logging (as detailed in a 1995 Global Witness report, which exposed deals between American business representatives, Thai authorities and KR cadres), it is fair to say that a portion of this money was already circulating in Cambodia, but within the KR's parallel economy instead of the Cambodian state's (Channo 1995, Grainger 1996). Consequently, the normalization of trade relations between the RG and the U.S. brought this segment of the economy into the state-fold, to the detriment of KR financial autonomy. More importantly, the expected influx of Western investment could be used to persuade potential

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[34] MFN status was a prerequisite for GSP entry, but MFN status was considered a done deal by diplomatic sources (Chheng & Barber 1995).

spoilers that Cambodia's post-war development would produce enough wealth for *every*

stakeholder to profit from peace.

Over the next four months, the Royal Government signed land concession deals with

Samling Timber Malaysia and the Panin Group[35], representing over 30% of the country's total

forestry (Post Staff 1995). It also took a major step towards the ASEAN "family" in July, when

Cambodia was granted observer status in the regional economic community (Grainger 1995; Post

Staff 1995). The analytical relevance of these agreements does not flow from their monetary

value alone, but also because of their long-term implications. Land concession deals reinforced

the centrality of "legal" land ownership flowing from the state, as opposed to rent-seeking

flowing from the absence of state authority, in the extraction of wealth. As early as July 1994, the

RCAF owned over 6% of Cambodian territory, which it leased out to foreign companies with

little to no oversight over negotiations (Grainger 1996b). The RG's goal was not to eliminate

rebel-controlled opportunity structures (i.e. resource exploitation), but to co-opt them in a way

that made economic power pass through the state rather than local powerbrokers. By doing so, it

was in a position to offer a chance for "dispossessed" stakeholders to recoup the losses incurred

due to the logging ban, if they agreed to defect in good faith. On the other hand, ASEAN

membership represented the recognition of the RG's economic sovereignty by the very nations

that helped bankroll the KR's parallel governing structures over the preceding decade. This was a

major victory for the RG, which could point to this moment as more evidence that joining the

state fold would have long-term payouts for defectors. Moreover, to paraphrase Sihanouk,

Cambodia's integration into the ASEAN "family" would add an extra layer of security to the RG,

because it could turn to its neighbors "in times of need" (Grainger 1995) Thus, despite the fact

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[35] Panin Bank (Bank Pan Indonesia) acquired 1.5 million hectares of land in August 1995, while Samling bought 787,000 ha, equivalent to 11% of Cambodia in April 1995 (Post Staff 1995).

that KR insurgents intensified their campaign of rural terrorism at the beginning of 1995, the RG's "new strategy" continued to gain momentum on the political-economic front as the RCAF made progress on the military front.

As the 1996 offensive into Pailin drew to a close, the RG – and CPP in particular – continued to consolidate its leverage over the KR through another series of international agreements. These deals were major steps towards the centralization of political-economic opportunity into state structures, and the reconfiguration of peripheral political-economic structures in a way that incentivized peace. In May, the US Senate approved of Cambodia's MFN status, bringing it one step closer to American investment (Post Staff 1996); this was followed by an international donor summit in Tokyo in July 1996, where donor countries granted $581 million in aid to the RG for the next year. Less than a week after securing this assistance, government officials, led by Hun Sen, visited Seoul in order to normalize diplomatic ties between the two countries, which would then allow South Korea to "join the Mekong gold rush" (Barber 1996; Munthit & Grainger 1996); shortly after the Seoul trip, Hun Sen met with China's President and Premier to sign bilateral trade agreements, investment protection provisions, and an accord between the CCP and CPP (Barber 1996). These diplomatic maneuvers were particularly noteworthy in the broader scheme of peacebuilding in Cambodia. On a material level, these partnerships were contingent on peace and would allow for an influx of long-term foreign investments that could only be accessed from within state structures like the CPP or RCAF. Indeed, foreign companies, ranging from car manufacturers to general contractors to mining companies and land developers, promised jobs and hundreds of millions of dollars for Cambodia's post-conflict development plans (Lang 1996; Munthit & Grainger 1996). Even if this investment was not guaranteed, *per se,* the establishment of diplomatic ties with South Korea

and China signaled a new chapter of Cambodian foreign relations and marked the increasing

domination of the CPP within the RG coalition: Sihanouk had historically refused to recognize

the South Korean government, while the delegation sent to Beijing was exclusively made of CPP

officials. At this point, it was clear that the KR had failed in its efforts to destroy the RG's

international image. If anything, its campaign of rural terrorism and kidnapping of tourists forced

the group's foreign sponsors to acknowledge that the KR, not the CPP, were the main barrier to

conflict termination in Cambodia. Thus, going into August 1996, the table for negotiations was

set, with each party's bargaining position effectively locked in.

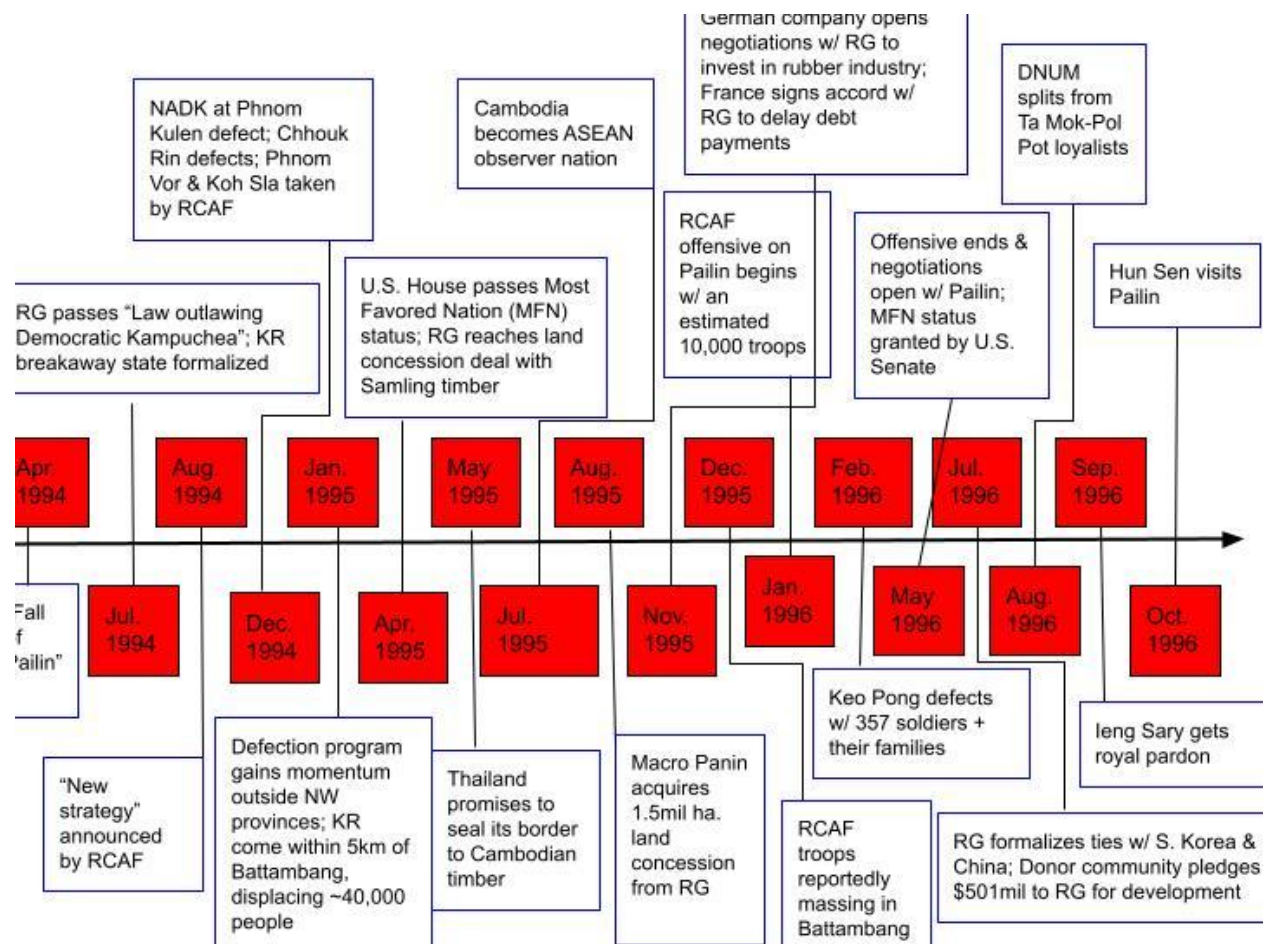**Summarizing the bargaining table**

In its negotiated settlement with KR strongmen in isolated enclaves like Phnom Vor and

Phnom Kulen, RCAF leadership had shown that it was prepared to make "whatever concessions

necessary" to encourage high-level defections (Grainger & Munthit 1996). However, when

compared to KR powerbrokers from the first wave of defections, Ieng Sary's faction had a

greater capacity to spoil Cambodia's emergence from civil war, even if it did not necessarily pose

an existential threat to the RG. As Fearon and Laitin (2003) note, a relatively small insurgent

group can still inflict significant human losses; and as Schelling (1996) puts it, the "power to

hurt", i.e. the power to inflict pain and suffering on the adversary, provides leverage during

negotiations (7-9). In effect, a united KR retained the ability to undermine security, generate

IDPs and discourage foreign investment. Moreover, its deployment of landmines in Zone 2

villages and rice paddies doubled as a means of terrorism, which hindered the repatriation of

displaced citizens. This tactic rendered thousands of hectares of cultivable land unusable,

because even "ghost minefields" (i.e. land rumored but not confirmed to be mined) required

thorough demining (Grainger & Chaumeau 1996). It was unlikely that this strategy was enough

to reverse the state's consolidation of material power, but seasoned observers including Hayes (1995) and Thayer (1996) expected the "die-hard cadres" and the estimated 5,000-10,000 "hardliners" in Pailin and Anlong Veng to resist until they were physically wiped out (Munthit 1996; Post Staff 1995)[36]. Regardless, securing the defection of Pailin power brokers would relegate the Pol Pot-Ta Mok faction to Anlong Veng, debilitate the extremists financially and allow the RCAF to focus on containing rebel activity elsewhere. Taking these factors into account, Sary's demands for a three year transitional period, during which the Pailin and Malai faction – referred to as the Democratic National Union Movement (DNUM) from here on out — would retain political-economic semi-autonomy, were not necessarily outlandish.

On the contrary, administrative semi-autonomy and military neutrality from DNUM suited the RG very well. First, the RCAF would not need to devote extra material and man-power to prevent remaining hardliners from operating around Pailin and Malai; indeed, DNUM forces would act as territorial defense units protecting their own villages from potential spoilers. Second, the increasing influx of current and future state revenue from foreign investment and tourism meant that the post-conflict economy would be large enough to accommodate key rebel power-brokers without impacting the pre-existing structures of state corruption. Third, RG leaders could use a non-violent settlement with DNUM as evidence of its credibility, in order to improve its image locally and internationally. Finally, as Thailand cut business ties with the KR, and defections mounted, the group no longer had the material capacity to reproduce the success of their 1994 campaign. To put it simply, the outcome of negotiated settlement would not be zero-sum, as it had been before the RG's new grand strategy: in August

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[36] There was a wide range of estimates of KR troop strength pre-DNUM, but more than half of these so-called hardline guerillas, "too disciplined" and loyal to defect, ended up siding with "moderates" in Pailin led by Sary and Chhean. Obviously, it is easier to point out this distinction with 25 years of hindsight, but this detail goes to caution underestimating the fluidity and diversity of identity, motives, interests etc. within monolithic, depersonalized structures (i.e. NADK).

1996, defection was now the rational choice for KR power-brokers and soldiers alike.

Timeline boxes (above the line, left to right):

RG passes "Law outlawing Democratic Kampuchea"; KR breakaway state formalized

NADK at Phnom Kulen defect; Chhouk Rin defects; Phnom Vor & Koh Sla taken by RCAF

U.S. House passes Most Favored Nation (MFN) status; RG reaches land concession deal with Samling timber

Cambodia becomes ASEAN observer nation

German company opens negotiations w/ RG to invest in rubber industry; France signs accord w/ RG to delay debt payments

RCAF offensive on Pailin begins w/ an estimated 10,000 troops

Offensive ends & negotiations open w/ Pailin; MFN status granted by U.S. Senate

DNUM splits from Ta Mok-Pol Pot loyalists

Hun Sen visits Pailin

Timeline markers (on the line): Apr. 1994, Aug. 1994, Jan. 1995, May 1995, Aug. 1995, Dec. 1995, Feb. 1996, Jul. 1996, Sep. 1996

Timeline markers (below the line): Fall of Pailin, Jul. 1994, Dec. 1994, Apr. 1995, Jul. 1995, Nov. 1995, Jan. 1996, May 1996, Aug. 1996, Oct. 1996

Timeline boxes (below the line, left to right):

"New strategy" announced by RCAF

Defection program gains momentum outside NW provinces; KR come within 5km of Battambang, displacing ~40,000 people

Thailand promises to seal its border to Cambodian timber

Macro Panin acquires 1.5mil ha. land concession from RG

RCAF troops reportedly massing in Battambang

Keo Pong defects w/ 357 soldiers + their families

RG formalizes ties w/ S. Korea & China; Donor community pledges $501mil to RG for development

Ieng Sary gets royal pardon

Conclusion: Establishment of material credibility

In the two years leading up DNUM's defection, the RCAF and RG worked in tandem to minimize the viability of insurgency in Cambodia's western peripheries. For the RCAF, this entailed: (a) streamlining its hierarchy to reduce corruption and organizational disunity, (b) building infrastructure and consolidating control over key supply routes, in order to improve its access to isolated KR strongholds, (c) returning to the "population-centric" COIN strategy that

was effective for its KPRA predecessor, centered on integrating and reinforcing local authority structures in KR-dominated areas[37].

In the fallout of the 1994 offensive, the RG needed to reimagine its approach to peacebuilding and do whatever it could to enter into the international community. Once Cambodia gained access to Western investment, the reward for defecting to the RCAF, sooner rather than later, would become even more lucrative. Thus, between 1995 and 1997, state officials completed a series of bilateral and multilateral agreements with regional and international entities, which centralized political-economic power into RG/RCAF structures.

By following through with its commitments to protect and reward KR defectors in Kampot, Siem Reap and Battambang, the state established a concrete precedent that it was both willing and capable of acting as a security guarantor. Yet, the strength of the "new" strategy stemmed as much from what state-affiliated forces *stopped* doing in rebel territory as it did from improved military capabilities. Indeed, the RCAF did not necessarily have to beat insurgents into submission, nor did it have to win the "hearts and minds" in rebel-controlled districts because it left the pre-existing authority structures and political networks intact. As violence became more limited in scale and geographical reach, there emerged a metaphysical "opening" through which contestatory discourse could permeate and discredit KR doctrine. As we will see in the next section, KR hardliners found it increasingly difficult to uphold violent imaginaries, as recent RCAF defectors shared their experiences with relatives and friends still living around Pailin.

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[37] It should be noted that Boraden 's conclusions relating to the 1979-1991 period hold true when applied to the 1994-1997 period. Indeed, there are striking parallels between KPRA/SOC strategy and the RCAF's "new strategy". These parallels suggest that CPP-aligned military leaders took more direct control over the RCAF following the 1994 offensive.

Part 4: Shattering KR Credibility, Building Narratives of "Unity" and "National Reconciliation"

The implementation of the negotiated settlement between DNUM and the RG would require a comprehensive deconstruction of the justificatory frames underpinning Khmer Rouge's insurgency. As discussed in Chapter 1, the "paranoid isolation" of KR populations and the mobilization of all segments of insurgent society in Pol Pot's "People's War" facilitated the rationalization of cyclical violence as state forces did not distinguish between civilians and combatants. These normative expectations became self-fulfilling commitment problems in the context of Cambodian (counter)insurgency in the 1980s and early 1990s, where "violent imaginaries" were a reality. Consequently, the material dimension of Cambodia's emergence from nearly 30 years of civil war only tells half of the story. This brings us back to another foundational assumption in this thesis: when the discursive frames underpinning a given power structure align with observable, lived experiences – regardless of whether these experiences are "rigged" by elites – the frames become salient enough to influence the expression of agency in a way that solidifies power dynamics, even once the frames become factually-incorrect or obsolete from an outside perspective[38]. Cognitive biases, like confirmation bias and frequency illusion, are additional barriers to the success of negotiated settlements because of their ability to reinforce conditioned beliefs about the enemy's intentions and tendencies.

If there are such deeply entrenched and "sticky" obstacles – sometimes disconnected from "objective realities" – blocking reconciliation after decades of insurgency, how can we account for DNUM's abrupt breakaway and subsequent integration into state structures over less than four months? Changing power dynamics/structures open up space for contestatory discourse

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[38] This broadly applies to "elites" as much as it does to the "masses", the main difference being their "power to define" or to articulate/proliferate frames (Demmers 2017, 144).

to permeate a previously insular/isolated society, essentially challenging that group's preconceived conceptions of the other (i.e. projecting hostile, devious intentions) and their broader perception of "reality". Concretely, this is because more people can be reached by counternarratives articulated by their former "aggressors", and may begin to question the legitimacy of structures of domination – without necessarily outwardly expressing this doubt. It is also within this space that mutual understanding and compatible narratives develop between former enemies, through dialogue, interaction and media.

In this chapter, we will explore two discursive processes that were vital to the RG's establishment of three-dimensional credibility in NW Cambodia, which would allow it to reinforce the political-economic foundations of a post-conflict *status quo* without necessarily using force as a first resort. The first section is devoted to discourse that contested dominant narratives by highlighting the growing dissonance between KR doctrine and the observable realities at the time. We will focus on contestatory discourse from DNUM leadership to justify the group's split with Northern leadership and its subsequent defection to the RCAF, while also taking time to highlight the counter-narratives articulated by previous defectors. Drawing primarily on public statements and interviews conducted by PPP journalists with civilians, soldiers, and power brokers on both sides of the conflict, it is possible to draw out the events, developments and lines of reasoning that provided discursive openings to delegitimize the Khmer Rouge and insurgency.

We will then turn to the establishment of mutual understanding between former enemies as to *why* they used to fight and *why* they did not need to fight anymore. Here, interviews, focus groups and polls conducted by the ICRC for their 1999 report "People on War", as well as articles from PPP online archives, provide insights into why calls for "unity and national

reconciliation" resonated as master frames after 1996. By reaching a mutually beneficial narrative to answer these questions, all those implicated – by choice or not – in post-1993 violence could metaphorically close a "dark" chapter in NW Cambodia's history and turn to a new page in which civil war was both unnecessary and unacceptable. This section will be divided into three parts. The first part seeks to highlight the common points between DNUM, RG and Anlong Veng narratives, while the next part centers on the subtle differences between the three groups' justificatory frames. Finally, we will delve into the strategic, functional dimension of these increasingly hegemonic discourses.

Challenging dominant narratives

Delegitimizing KR doctrine

Empirical credibility

As integration gained momentum between 1995 and 1996, hardline KR doctrine and rhetoric grew increasingly dissonant with the lived experiences of those fighting on the frontlines, face to face with state forces. Challenges to these narratives contested the need for national liberation from foreign invaders, and honed in on the inconsistency between the group's professed values and its campaign of rural terrorism. For example, KR propaganda claiming that Cambodia was still overrun with Vietnamese soldiers and settlers rang "hollow" with foot soldiers and cadres outside of the main rebel strongholds (Thayer 1995):

> "Their line on the Vietnamese issue does not fit the reality in many parts of the country, particularly the north and west," says one Cambodian source close to the Khmer Rouge. "Once the people realize there are no Vietnamese, all the DK logic collapses."

> "Most of us do not believe that Vietnamese control Cambodia," said former
>
> Khmer Rouge regiment commander Tung Yun who defected in January [1995].
>
> "When we went to fight we did not see other nationalities. We fought because we
>
> were ordered to do so but in our hearts we did not want war anymore."

Similarly, there was little evidence suggesting that Hun Sen was a Vietnamese or Western "puppet", even if he was initially installed by the occupying forces ten years prior: as Ieng Sary told Post reporters in 1996, "*if* there [was a Vietnamese influence in Phnom Penh[39]]", he did not know "how that influence ha[d] an effect on lives in Phnom Penh" (Grainger, Chaumeau, Munthit & Hayes 1996). As for being a "Western puppet", Hun Sen's provocative rhetoric in response to criticism from Western powers, not to mention the fact that the US and European powers halted lethal aid to the RCAF in December 1994, suggested that the relationship was not as amicable as KR propaganda portrayed it. Indeed, Western diplomats repeatedly expressed frustration with the RG's refusal to prosecute Chhouk Rin and other KR defectors implicated in the 1994 hostage crisis (Barber 1995).

Frame consistency

With no evidence of Vietnamese military presence or influence over the RG, the use of unrestricted violence against state forces was neither acceptable, nor necessary. As Thayer (1995) and the Angkor Chum defectors he spoke to highlighted, Pol Pot and Ta Mok's decision to ramp up attacks on civilians and aid workers in government-controlled areas was a major turning point in the broader deconstruction of KR credibility. How could hardliners claim to represent Cambodia's peasantry while literally murdering Cambodian peasants and burning their homes as a matter of policy? On a fundamental level, rural terrorism clashed with the KR's discursive self-portrayal as a paternalistic force defending the country's rural population against

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[39] Here, "Phnom Penh" is most likely a reference to the RG seated there, not the city itself.

an existential threat. In addition, the RG's "new strategy" eroded the experiential commensurability of the KR's claim that resistance was a "matter of life or death" for soldiers and their families. In fact, hardliners themselves proved to be a greater threat to the "People" than the RCAF, a reality laid bare by Pol Pot's decision to publicly execute Son Sen, his wife and their 13 children before running over their bodies with trucks (Thayer 1997).

The third observable inconsistency between the KR's professed values and its actions related to KR leadership's supposed devotion to national unity and reconciliation. Mak Ben claimed in 1994 that the KR had "requested and continue[d] to request to sit down and talk", but RCAF's "only reply" to these offers for negotiations was its attack on Anlong Veng, which left the group with no choice but to take up arms again (Thayer 1994). Later in the speech, he tied fighting to Cambodia's lack of "foreign investment", "reconciliation" and its population's suffering. The issue here was not the validity of this reasoning, but the fact that he inadvertently delegitimized the use of violence as a means of achieving collective progress, while also acknowledging that the "People" wanted economic development. Thus, hardliners put themselves in a difficult position as the situation reversed over the second half of 1994 and throughout 1995; indeed, the RG was offering non-violent solutions to the conflict with military integration, development proposals and royal pardons, which hardliners continued to respond to with mass violence. In turn, these challenges to the empirical credibility and the observable consistency of KR narratives provided a discursive opening for other prospective defectors from Pailin to contest the old-guard's credibility and legitimacy.

Articulator's credibility

As highlighted in the first chapter, a power-broker or leader's perceived expertise often allows them to filter contradictory information and "explain away" inconsistencies between justificatory

frames and conduct on the ground. Put differently, frame articulators point to past successes in order to prove their current and future ability to identify salient issues and propose the best solutions. For the KR, memories and stories of the group's "legendary" insurgencies against the Lon Nol regime and Vietnamese/PRK military served to justify the *Angkar*'s totalitarian approach to insurgency in the 1990s (Thayer 1995, 1996; Boraden 2015, 311). However, as the everyday reality changed and these memories grew more distant in the years following Vietnam's, then UNTAC's withdrawals, the old guard's credibility became increasingly vulnerable to contestatory discourse.

This discourse emphasized two overarching problems with hardline leadership. The first line of reasoning contended that, given the inconsistencies between frames and observable reality, Pol Pot-Ta Mok loyalists were stuck in the past with their anti-Vietnamese and class war rhetoric (Ashley 1998). According to one former KR guerilla in Malai, treating civilians as enemy combatants was "right during the period of foreign invasion, but it is wrong because no more foreign invaders are here now" (ICRC 1999, 3). Other interviewees highlighted that they believed that there could be "no progress" in the context of violent conflict, and that war only moved Cambodia "backwards" (ibid, 9). Political leaders advocating for continued insurgency were thus deemed unfit to lead a popular movement in the emergent political-economic status quo, particularly compared to DNUM's "moderate" leadership. It is important to note for future purposes that this frame did not seek to invalidate the narrative of a "just war" in the 1980s. Rather, it aimed at bringing attention to the obsolescence of hardline doctrine in a non-civil war setting. The second counternarrative targeted the hardline faction's ever-growing list of enemies by contesting the inclusion of long-time local political and military leaders. According to Ieng Sary, many DNUM soldiers were outraged when KR radio accused Ee Chhean of being a

"corrupt" and "rotten element" (Barber 1996; Grainger, Chaumeau, Munthit & Hayes 1996). Indeed, Chhean had proven his dedication to the people of Pailin as he and those under his command "fought for death and survival in the frontlines for many years" to defend the stronghold. Thus, when KR propagandists claimed that "one hundred percent of the masses, cadres, troops and their families" in Pailin remained loyal to Northern leadership, DNUM radio hosts were quick to reiterate support for Sary, and reminded listeners that it was the Khmer Rouge "who confiscated possessions, such as ox-carts" (Barber 1996; Thayer 1996). By referring specifically to ox-carts, which were a cornerstone of sustenance farming, DNUM frame articulators emphasized the broader centrality of ensuring property rights for rural populations compared to another attempt to overthrow Cambodia's "exploiting classes" (Ashley 1998). Here again, the dissonance between hardline rhetoric and the lived experiences of its target audience added yet another layer of doubt as to whether senior leadership was fit to make decisions on behalf of the "People". On a theoretical level, this counter-discourse diminished the third dimension of KR power over insurgent society. In other words, the KR's power to credibly define the "enemies of the people", the masses' best interests and individuals' expected role was crumbling under the weight of contestatory discourse from inside its ranks, not to mention RCAF military pressure and the appeal of economic development.

Justifying DNUM's defection

Signification

Like its revised military and political-economic strategies, the RG's progress towards the integration of DNUM forces was not without setbacks. Between August and November 1996, Hun Sen exchanged harsh words with Ieng Sary and Ee Chhean: Hun Sen accused the latter two of selfishly delaying the process until they secured senior positions in the RG, while Sary and

Chhean charged CPP-affiliated troops with "oppressing" disarmed DNUM soldiers and civilians

(Chaumeau & Munthit 1996). However, the often hostile public back-and-forth between state

officials and Pailin's powerbrokers played a critical role in the establishment of a

mutually-acceptable framework to justify DNUM's assimilation into the RCAF hierarchy. More

specifically, the public dialogue exchanged between DNUM and CPP leadership offers a glimpse

into the discursive process of "signification". It is a fundamentally intersubjective concept, which

blurs the line between objective, observable realities and subjective interpretations of these

realities. Signification refers to the way in which agents attach a certain meaning or interpretive

frame to an action/event through discourse, looking to mobilize, retain and/or legitimize support

for a given interest group (Jabri 1996; Demmers 2017; Benford & Snow 2000, 624; Apter 1997,

12). As such, discourse from elites must be taken with a grain of salt, particularly when they

claim to speak on behalf of the "masses".

In September 1996, with growing political friction in Phnom Penh as a backdrop, DNUM

upper leadership formalized Pailin/Malai's pre-existing administrative structures, complete with

a foreign liaison office, a finance department and a local "Army of the Democratic National

Union Movement" (Barber & Munthit 1996). Long Norin and Sary defended this move by

claiming that it was necessary for people to "fully understand national reconciliation, national

unity, and putting an end to the war" (Grainger, Chaumeau, Munthit & Hayes 1996). The group

had no intentions of prolonging the conflict, and the formalization of DNUM authority structures

was "not intended to create any autonomous zone at all" (Barber & Munthit 1996). However,

because many DNUM's soldiers were indoctrinated by Pol Pot, Norin claimed, they would need

to be eased into the national army: "it's just like a wedding - when you force a man and woman

to get married, that's not good" (Barber & Munthit 1996). Indeed, Pailin's leadership expressed

their desire for a "union" with the RG, insinuating a degree of parity between DNUM and the CPP within the central government. Above all, DNUM's prospective defectors would never "offer submission" to the CPP "like Keo Pong" (ibid). Alluding to Pong's defection and subsequent remobilization as a CPP negotiator, Ieng Sary emphasized that the faction's soldiers would not accept a settlement that left the door open for their remobilization to the frontlines. As conceptualized by DNUM power brokers, integration was thus a top-down, collective process that depended on *their* willingness to defect, rather than the rank-and-file's willingness to join the RCAF; conversely, these power brokers assumed that the majority of Pailin's soldiers would follow them if they decided to renege on DNUM's neutrality.

For Hun Sen, these moves signified an unconstitutional "secession" that undermined the principle of national unity. If political negotiations failed, he warned, the RCAF was prepared to "use the other way" because "Cambodia ha[d] to be united at any price"; in the meantime, the RCAF would focus on integrating rank-and-file defectors and senior commanders (ibid). Hun Sen also co-opted KR hardline narratives that painted breakaway leaders and intellectuals as self-interested "politicians" – distinct from "senior military chiefs" – thereby implying that they were detached from popular sentiment, which was asking him for "peace, national reconciliation and development" (Barber & Munthit 1996). On a political level, it was out of the question for the CPP to allow DNUM to become a "third force" within the RG by granting Sok Pheap and Chhean positions in RCAF's General Staff, as offered by FUNCINPEC negotiators (Barber & Munthit 1996)[40]. If Pailin leaders were allowed to join the government, the potential alliance

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[40] According to one party official interviewed by Barber (1997): "the CPP believe[d] that the hardliners of the KR [were] always trying to divide the government from the inside. [They] knew that the Khmer Rouge [would] never submit to be a true subordinate to Ranariddh." MPs from opposition parties agreed that the KR were not "scared of FUNCINPEC", emphasizing that the group did not respect the Royalists' military wing. In addition, Ranariddh himself publicly stated in April 1996 that he and his ministers were merely "puppets" in the RG power arrangement, wielding negligible power compared to Hun Sen and the CPP.

between DNUM and FUNCINPEC (*à la* CGDK) could jeopardize the CPP's dominance over the RCAF, and would certainly hinder Hun Sen's consolidation of power[41].

Who spoke for "The People"?

No elite truly spoke for the average soldier and their (extended) family, but portions of the narratives from both sides actually aligned with the experiences and expectations of the "People". As cliché as it may sound, the overwhelming majority of soldiers, civilians and local leaders interviewed by PPP journalists and ICRC researchers expressed one demand in exchange for defecting: an end to war in Pailin. As Moorthy & Sarouen (1997) reported:

> The former KR warriors seem to have no stomach for battle these days. "We are so bored of fighting, we don't want to fight any more," said Chuk Thet, a 31-year-old military policeman. He added that if Pailin's troops were to end up fighting after all, they might as well have stayed with the hardliners. He said he and his fellow soldiers want only to stay neutral, and to avoid getting embroiled in politics.

For former KR commune chief Men Yon (Sinith, Sarouen & Grainger 1998):

> It was very tough before the defection (...) Local people had to lay down thousands of [sharpened bamboo] punji sticks along the front-line. One in ten were disabled by mines, he says (gently cradling his own stumped leg).

Neutrality had multiple compatible definitions in this context: for DNUM defectors, it meant that the RCAF would not remobilize them against the remaining NADK, nor were they expected to deal with future internal conflicts (CPP-FUNCINPEC). For the CPP, DNUM's integration and

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[41] Deception was an explicit pillar of KR doctrine, and the group thrived in Sihanouk's shadow during the 1980s, using the CGDK as a funnel for international support (Etcheson 1993;Terry 2002). Thus, the CPP's suspicions were not necessarily unfounded, as foreign and local observers also acknowledged that reconciliation between Pailin and Anlong Veng was still conceivable (Barber 1997). Nonetheless, historians Heder and Ashley suggested that the party exaggerated the risk in its public statements (ibid).

neutrality were linked, and defectors were expected to prevent the NADK and Royalist forces from operating within the Pailin province (Scroggins & Arizzi 1997). Thus, DNUM power brokers tacitly committed to respect the CPP's growing dominance over central governing structures, and in exchange the CPP would respect the pre-existing local political-economic institutions. Within this framework, integration did not mean defectors were "offering submission" to the RG, nor was the RG allowing defectors to become a "third force".

Sewing shut the master cleavages

Building mutual understanding

In the final chapter of *Discourses on Violence* (1996), Vivienne Jabri looks to posit how lasting peace can emerge from violence in the first place, if the socio-political forces underpinning war

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[42] A Khmer Rouge guerilla (left) shares a soda with an RCAF soldier (right) in Pailin after DNUM defected (Falise nd.).

are so resilient. Although she accepts that a degree of coercion or force may be necessary to dislodge entrenched interests and power-brokers who benefit from war, she emphasizes the importance of building mutual understanding between combatants. It is here that individuals can demonstrate their ability to be "agents of change" by participating in discursive (or physical) challenges to "structures of domination". Through positive interaction and dialogue, former enemies may gain a different interpretive lens to reflect on the past, and use this understanding to guide their future decisions. Although this perspective may seem idealistic at first glance, it helps to recall that credibility is intersubjective – whether it is material or normative – resting on *beliefs* about reality and what to expect from others.

Coincidentally, Ieng Sary repeatedly referenced the importance of mutual understanding when discussing how to solidify the wave of pacifism expressed by defectors throughout the 1994-1998 period. If principles of national reconciliation and unity were to be normalized on a national level "some non-KR [had to] go into Pailin, and some former KR people [had to] come out of Pailin" (Marcher & Rasmussen 2000). It was vital to engrain these values and memories of KR oppression in Pailin and other former KR strongholds because the geographical (rough terrain and monsoons) and political-economic (poverty and corruption) conditions that facilitated insurgency in the past had not disappeared, and were unlikely to change in the future. To facilitate the creation of social relationships between the previously divided populations in NW Cambodia, people needed a compatible, mutually-convenient narrative to justify the wrongs of the past, and to communicate why they and others should not participate in the renewal of cyclical violence.

ICRC (1999) interviewees expressed several common norms and beliefs about reality that simultaneously justified participating in past brutality, while framing continued insurgency

between Khmers as unacceptable. More specifically, civilians and former combatants expressed

similar understandings of the conditions that legitimized armed resistance, the nature of political

leaders, and the cyclical nature of violent conflict. The brutality of KR insurgency, particularly in

the 1980s, was almost unanimously justified by the conditions of foreign occupation: if war was

waged to "protect our territory" and to resist "foreigners who want to take our land", it was

unfortunate but necessary to take up arms (ICRC 1999, 2). At the same time, KR returnees and

RCAF members drew a line between anti-Vietnamese insurgency and KR insurgency in the

1990s. While external war was legitimate, civil war in Cambodia was driven by "power-greedy"

politicians who "conscripted people's children to fight" for "power and personal benefits, not for

the progress of the country (ibid, 4). In other words, violence was now void of any moral value:

"war in Cambodia [was not] the war of patriotism (...) it was the war of grabbing power" (ibid,

3). These perceptions were significant because they influenced whether people would mobilize

in case of future conflict. As one rural youth in Battambang stated, "if [war] is between Khmer

and Khmer we will not [fight] – we want that to stop. But if it is with foreigners (...) we will go"

(ibid).

The final consensus, and perhaps the most impactful in terms of durable peace, related to

the cyclical nature of violence, the inherent chaos of war, and the restrictions violent conflict

placed on individual agency. When asked how they would treat a capture enemy combatant, most

respondents first distinguished between a foreign and Khmer soldier, but also emphasized that

executing, torturing or "even not helping" captured soldiers would do little more than prolong

violence:

If we kill them, it will create revenge (...) causing more people to die.

If we kill, it will create more hatred and revenge.

> If killing back and forth, there will be war.
>
> We should not kill, because the result is death again and again.
>
> Yes we have our anger. But if we kill, it would never end. (ICRC 1999, 20)

As the ICRC put it, respondents seemed to be "looking for an excuse to show mercy to enemy soldiers", drawing on logic and humanism even when that soldier killed a love one (21):

> Even if we kill him, our friend will not come back to life.
>
> [The enemy soldier] did not have the intention to kill our friend, but in fighting, killing is inevitable.
>
> The enemy that killed our friend is also a war victim.
>
> The war victim is an innocent person being forced to be a soldier (...) We would save him.
>
> Victims can change and improve themselves.

Indeed, combatants and civilians on both sides acknowledged that the chaos of war robbed nearly everyone of their agency:

> We [were] afraid of death if we did not shelter soldiers, if we did not share food (...) we had no choice.
>
> Wherever you stay, you take that side.
>
> [Soldiers] did not want to kill civilians (...) but there was no option (...) no distinction in this type of war.
>
> In war there is usually chaos, therefore harm to civilians cannot be avoided.
>
> Touching and harming is inevitable.
>
> In fighting, bullets have no eyes. (ICRC 1999, 13, 25)

These beliefs served two functions: first and foremost, it allowed victims to process the trauma of insurgency, but also served to absolve victim-perpetrators (i.e. the rank and file) of moral responsibility for their role in violence. Indeed, the "law of the jungle" was imposed on every segment of society, and those who fought were manipulated by predatory elites, resorting to violence out of necessity and ignorance:

> Fighting has imposed an ideology of violence on everybody.
>
> We did not talk about the future (...) only self-defense.
>
> The guns [KR child soldiers] carried barely touched the ground. They
>
> knew nothing. (ibid, 2)

This narrative effectively gave former combatants a fresh start within the emergent post-conflict status quo. From this blank slate, those living in NW Cambodia could reject the "violent imaginaries" of KR doctrine and instead embrace the principle of "national unity" that both sides claimed to represent.

The concrete impact of discourse

While the establishment of mutual understanding might seem less salient than material changes in the viability of KR insurgency, it is essential to understand why Cambodia has yet to suffer conflict recurrence in spite of the 1997 CPP coup, persistent corruption and political repression. Through everyday interactions between former enemies – sharing beers and stories of their war experiences – future conflict became unthinkable. With a common understanding of the cyclical nature of insurgency, power-brokers and rank-and-file could express their agency; by extension, they could be held accountable for participating in violence without a legitimate reason. Indeed, social and structural forces were now pushing towards durable peace and unity, not division and violence.

Conclusion

When deployed independently as a means of reaching a durable settlement to KR insurgency, pure military force, transactional political-economic deals, nor reconciliatory discourse sufficed to bring rebel power-brokers to the negotiating table. In fact, the RCAF and RG's disjointed strategies to catalyze the political and military integration of prospective KR defectors played directly into the hands of the group's hardliners. In the context of civilian victimization and general insecurity in Western Cambodia, RCAF negotiators were poorly placed to claim that the state was capable and willing to follow through with security commitments to NADK defectors. On the contrary, the RCAF's purely coercive COIN strategy in 1994 jump-started the remilitarization of KR society and reproduced the conditions in which guerilla tactics thrive. Moreover, it was difficult to promise KR defectors that their family's property would be protected as cohorts of unpaid and unfed RCAF soldiers looted their homes.

Yet, senior KR leadership proved time and time again that it was not to be trusted as a negotiating partner, and would take advantage of whatever concessions the RG made as gestures of good faith. Indeed, the KR exploited humanitarian aid throughout the 1980s, used UN-back ceasefires to consolidate its territorial power during the UNTAC period, and as the "KR Papers" showed in 1998, still planned on taking advantage of political integration to fracture the nascent RG from within. In other words, the group's hardliners remained intent on defeating the Cambodian state, not settling the conflict. Thus, the RCAF still had to be capable of using force to protect defectors from retribution, not to mention the territory it captured from rebel infiltration. Finally, forward-looking transactional deals with prospective defectors were essentially void if the RG, as a governing structure, could not project its authority five to ten years into the future.

In many ways, the resurgence of civil war in NW Cambodia following the 1994 RCAF offensive grounded a range of theoretical explanations of the dynamics of insurgency. In the context of state incapacity, rebels had the opportunity to operate freely outside of urban centers, using their advantage in local collaboration and information to protect KR strongholds and destabilize government-controlled areas; and like most insurgents, the group was subsidized by a hostile neighbor, which provided it with physical sanctuary and funds. The motives for insurgency were diverse: controlling territory allowed power-brokers to exploit natural resources like timber and gems, wealth that could then be used to pay soldiers; some people still had faith in Pol Pot's "People's War", or survived by following a particular power-broker; however, most were left with no choice but to fight, having been abducted or conscripted by the NADK. If we take all these factors as "critical barriers" to negotiated settlement and the establishment of credible commitments, the RG was fighting an uphill battle against KR hardliners.

In this case, how was the Cambodian state able to reverse the descent into full-fledged civil war, ultimately reaching a negotiated settlement less than four years later? The success of the RG/RCAF's new strategy stemmed from an understanding that insurgency was fundamentally multicausal, a product of decades of civilian victimization, foreign influence and individual greed, but also discursive frames that normalized the "law of the jungle". In other words, the state acknowledged that it needed a multidimensional strategy to build its credibility.

First, it addressed state weakness, mainly through military integration and improved infrastructure, to resolve the security dilemma faced by potential KR defectors. The improvement of the road systems connecting government strongholds and forward positions was essential to consolidate territorial control, making it possible for the RCAF to protect collaborators in peripheral areas. Concretely, the integration of KR defectors in Kampot and

Siem Reap had six effects: (a) it enhanced the RCAF's access to local information, exposing KR informant networks, (b) it offered territorial units to the RCAF, which were historically effective against the NADK, (c) reduced NADK presence in more central, geostrategically important areas, (d) restricted rebel access to food, weapons and ammunition as defectors handed NADK outposts and villages to the RCAF. Perhaps more importantly, military integration offered opportunities to challenge prevailing narratives and expectations: (e) the RCAF could *prove* its commitment to protect KR defectors, (f) experiences that defectors themselves would communicate to family and friends living in rebel-dominated areas. Thus, the RCAF was able to minimize the viability of insurgency – without foreign military aid – by improving its material capacity, specifically at the expense of the NADK "power to resist".

The second facet of state strategy built on this foundation of security, as the RG moved to incentivize long-term adherence to the conditions of integration by offering KR power-brokers a political-economic stake in Cambodia's post-conflict development. This was achieved mainly through the RG's integration into the international community, which concentrated political and economic power into state structures. In essence, the centralization of foreign investment into the RG robbed the KR of the material autonomy it enjoyed throughout its history, thus reducing the group's power to resist without holding territory. If the establishment of credible security guarantees provided the opportunity for KR power-brokers to defect, this invitation into the increasingly lucrative state fold served as an objective motive to abide by the conditions of military integration.

Nonetheless, despite this progress towards negotiated settlement, there were still geographical and economic factors that facilitated insurgency – the jungles and hills that isolated the northwestern borderlands from government strongholds did not disappear, and neither did

rural poverty. As a result, the RG needed to promote reasons outside of rational self-interests to render civil war unimaginable. This was achieved by elevating shared values of national sovereignty and the common experience of the brutality of insurgency, ideas that were articulated by leaders within the government like Hun Sen and Sihanouk, but also individual defectors and RCAF commanders who allowed these narratives to permeate KR society. To put this in theoretical terms, discourse and the establishment of mutual understanding between former combatants contributed to the normalization of "national reconciliation", while the integration of KR/NADK structures into the RCAF catalyzed the institutionalization of "national unity".

Ontological takeaways: Agency and structural change

The chaotic nature of insurgency, and the structures of domination that emerge in its context, like the NADK, severely restrict the expression of human agency through violence and indoctrination. Yet, how structural change unfolds cannot be understood without reference to the role of agents. As explored in this thesis, some individuals stand out as "first movers" against dominant normative forces – Chhouk Rin, Keo Pong and the rank-and-file NADK that defected individually; others wait to see whether the first movers succeed – Ieng Sary, Ee Chhean & Sok Pheap; finally, there are those who act to *prevent* progress and reinforce antagonistic relations – Pol Pot, Ta Mok and Ta Muth. This conceptualization reinforces the value Plummer's humanist approach to social research, and validates the constructivist description of humans as "purposive agents" (Mason 2002; Demmers 2017). What does this mean concretely? The best approach for those looking to make a positive impact on areas emerging from intractable conflict would be to find the "right" people to support, understanding that those with local authority and knowledge are often best-positioned to help their communities.

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